

THE NEW ONES

PERSECUTED

ANTONIO SOCCI

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Investigation into anti-Christian intolerance in the new century of martyrdom

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AS

Preface

The passage that struck me most in this book that the reader finds in his hands is not written by the author. And a quote that he reports in a note. These are some lines by Lévy-Strauss: «I began to reflect» the great scholar writes autobiographically French «at a time when our culture attacked other cultures, of which I therefore became a witness and defender. Now I have the impression that the movement has reversed and that our culture is on defensive in the face of external threats and in particular in the face of the Islamic threat. Suddenly, I feel ethnologically and firmly a defender of my culture."

They are words, moreover pronounced by a very authoritative and unsuspected source, which fully capture the perhaps central character of the time we have entered and which the inevitable symbolism of communication has now decided to mark with the date of 11 September, even if upon closer inspection it started much earlier. A time of turning point, in some ways of reversal. Everything, or almost everything, that seemed acquired, that it seemed to be

solid basis of the vision of the world and of the widespread sensitivity of the Western educated classes (and therefore more or less also of the political classes), "suddenly", as

says Lévy-Strauss, we now feel it as outdated and incongruous. "Suddenly", the ideas and even more the categories on which until yesterday we were accustomed to counting now appear fragile and treacherous to us; and finally even the past decades present themselves to us in a different light, sometimes dramatically different, from the one in which we were used to seeing them.

And since 1989, perhaps since 1991, that is, after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR, we have we began to understand that the world was going off the tracks on which we had placed it or even that perhaps, without us realizing it, it had long since begun to proceed along a path that we had not seen, understood or misunderstood. It is almost since then that we have discovered, in fact, that the weight of the past is stronger than the illusions of the future, that culture of a people cannot be modified at will like the shape of a pudding, that the dreams of reason are almost always lost in blood and even more often in nothingness, that history neither erases nor redeems from any crime, whether before or then all the knots come to the comb. And together we discovered that for for a long time we had forgotten, literally torn away from our memory, what we knew, perhaps, but which was or appeared to be in contradiction with what we were now discovering.

The book by Antonio Socci - one of our journalists sharper and more brilliant, accustomed to moving with equal effectiveness between politics and history, between culture and customs, between the short and sharp commentary and sophisticated analysis - constitutes precisely an important moment of this work of discovery, or rather, of real recovery from oblivion. It helps us remember a great one

removed: the killing - do we want to use the appropriate term? Martyrdom - of a huge number of Christians in the twentieth century. I cannot say whether the figures reported are precisely those, exact to the tenth and the unit, but their extent cannot be doubted and is such as to leave one breathless: over 40,000,000 Christians have been killed for their faith in of the century that has just ended, while it is estimated that around 160,000 people die for the same reason every year. It goes without saying that many more are persecuted, those who suffer restrictions on their religious freedom: they cannot open a church, they cannot attend a public religious function, they cannot print the texts of their faith.

In short, the twentieth century really appears - to resume the title of another book published recently and dedicated to the same topic - the "century of martyrdom". And this immediately raises two questions: why? Why the twentieth century, why is it precisely in this century that well over half of all those who, from the birth of Christ onwards, lost their lives for his name are concentrated? And secondly: how could it

and can it still happen today that our culture has such little memory and awareness of the existence of this river of blood? Do you show that you do not want to draw any lessons from it, nor, so to speak, any general conclusions?

It is certainly easier to answer the first question. In the northern hemisphere of the planet - if we ignore the Masonic anticlericalism he celebrated its liberticidal glories in Mexico - it is above all the totalitarian phenomenon that must be attributed the greatest responsibility for the anti-Christian persecutions. Materialism

biological materialism of National Socialism and the historical materialism of Marxism (brought to paroxysm in the Bolshevik-Leninist version) represented the two most massive theoretical attacks that have historically been never led to any perspective based on transcendence, in particular the Christian one. Radically atheistic due to their doctrinal origin, Nazism and Soviet communism then developed this origin into two socio-political constructions impregnated with a state oppression accustomed not to retreat in the face of any violence. The situation is different regarding the persecutions that have plagued the southern hemisphere with increasing intensity.

Here, in the South of the world, the decisive factors seem to me to have been two: the first and most important was the affirmation, on the ashes of colonialism, of a great number of independent states governed by elites, who not only generally had a cultural background foreign to the Christian one, but towards this background - which was essentially that of the ancient colonial powers - almost always had an understandable hostility. So that in many cases the temptation to obtain the consensus they need by stirring up the muddy bottom of intolerance towards the religion of the past dominators, who have remained in various senses the dominators of the world, has proven and still proves to be too strong for these elites. Add that then, in a certain number of cases, the religion in question is the same as that of local minorities among the most educated, most prosperous, the most dynamic.

But in the context of what has happened and is happening in the South of the world there has also been another non-negligible factor: the loss, that is, of the protective role in

towards Christianity and Christians in general to which the European Powers - from Russia to France - once felt obliged by virtue of their history: that is, of being Christian States, that is, founded on a decisive identity link between religion and public dimension. Now that, thanks to the happened secularization this no longer exists, the only protection that the followers of Christ can faintly hope for is the protection that can be provided by that sort of surrogate of the res publica christiana of the past which are the international conventions on the "rights of man". "placed under the aegis of the United Nations. But it will be enough to remember that one of the countries where Christians are most persecuted, Sudan, is among

members of the UN Commission on Human Rights
(recently replaced the USA!)
to understand what car to expect on that side.

It is only from the West that that help could come, but the West has so far been blind and mute, it has refused to see and speak. Socci's book, with its meticulous account of the anti-Christian persecutions, ends up constituting, therefore, also a very heavy indictment against the subtle hypocrisy of our culture (from the media to the University, to the various political affiliations) which on the whole has always preferred to the courage of denunciation - and especially in Italy - a comfortable "feel-good" conformism which even many circles religious did not hesitate to share.

Remorse for the historical misdeeds of European civilization (certainly true: but how many civilizations on the planet have approached diversity with no less violence!), cultural exoticism intertwined with myths

third world politicians, the progressive loss of identification of the European world with the Christian religion, these are all elements that have favored the taking root of . the silence I am talking about, which manifests itself first of all as silence regarding the true nature of the regimes that afflict so many of the non-European continents.

The Christians of those places were - and continue to be - among the first victims of this silence, produced not only by the, let's call them, ideological causes that I was saying before, but also by much more concrete causes: for example by the thousand interests that bind the economic and financial environments from the West to Asia and Africa, or rather from fear of the consequences of hostility that any possible reaction of ours could certainly attract.

Especially on the part of the Islamic world with which ours largely borders, and which the pages of Socci's book show us in the reality of its despotic regimes, characterized by a growing confessional tendency to which the main responsibility for the dramatic decline of pre.

without Christians throughout North Africa and the Mediterranean Levant, from which that presence also began to establish itself on the planet.

In light of this reality, the fierce debate on jihad that broke out in the West in the aftermath of September 11 appears in a certain sense to be truly pleonastic: in ultimately much more important than an outbreak of militant violence against the 'infidel' is the gray everyday life that slowly but surely erases every different religious and cultural reality.

We only became aware of this attack, which developed more or less silently over time, after the terrible outbreak of September 11th. Only after that date there

we have realized, in the words of Lévi-Strauss, that our culture is "on the defensive" and that Christianity has been, is, among the main victims of the clash, and therefore, perhaps to the surprise of many, we have discovered once again that when history thickens its storms and challenges us on the ultimate questions, then the

our response, the truth that decides what we are, can only be in the sign of that cross on which, two thousand years ago, a Jew who said he was the son of the God of Abraham was nailed.

- Ernesto Galli of the Loggia

Introduction

«You are among us, Lord, and we are called with Your name" (everyone calls us by your name), do not abandon us!" (Jer 14, 9).

This is the outcome, the most beautiful result of a conscience that feels revived and always relaunched by the grace of God throughout life.

«You are among us, Lord»: he became man, God!

«And we are called by Your name»: being called by Your name is the event of the mission, of the missionary experience.

"Do not abandon us" ever: it is prayer, the only one like this totally positive.

God strong and judge: it is above all an ultimate positivity, mercy. Anyone who looks to the judgment of God with a keen eye, he sees that God's judgment is the affirmation of everything that is in his person."

- Don Luigi Giussani

Maria, a young Egyptian girl, shows hers fragile wrist on whose flesh is imprinted a foul bracelet of scars. This disfigurement bears silent proof of the brutal kidnapping, rape and nine months of

slavery she endured at the hands of Islamic captors. As part of their plan to turn Maria into a Muslim, her kidnappers they poured sulfuric acid on her wrist to erase the cross tattoo she wore as an expression of her faith.

Mary is one of Egypt's 6,000,000 Coptic Christians, a minority community that has to cope to the growing mistreatment by Muslim fanatics. One day, while visiting her friends' house, she was eighteen years old, she was kidnapped by a group of radicals from an Islamic organization. After raping her, the kidnappers they moved her from one hiding place to another on the outskirts. Along with this sexual abuse, they demanded that Mary fast, perform (Islamic) prayers and memorize verses from the Koran.

At first, Maria tried to refuse to wear the traditional veil. «They warned me that if I had it If I had removed it they would have thrown acid on my face", the girl reports today. Ultimately, no longer being in able to oppose the claims of his captors, he signed the official document of conversion to Islam.

While Maria was under seizure, her father went to the Cairo police. There they told him to forget Mary, who was safe in the hands of Islam. That shocked man, in truth, was ordered to sign a commitment that he would cease searching

his daughter. Along with other family members, he was warned that those who interfered in Maria's life and harmed her would have to answer.

Fortunately Maria managed to escape. She was given cars by a clandestine group called "Servants of the

Cross" who kept her safe. Although conversion to Christianity from Islam is considered apostasy in Egypt, and Sharia law invokes a death sentence, the Servites helped her reconvert (officially, from the state's point of view, Editor's note) to Christianity. In Egyptian society, victims of rape are often held responsible for what happened to them, and are sometimes killed. With this in mind, the organization also helped Maria find a Christian husband.

The Servants of the Cross provided Mary with a tattoo artist to redo the cross on her wrist, exactly above the scars that scarred her. One of the organization's representatives explains: «every month I deal with a number of reconversions that varies from 30 to 35. Throughout Egypt we have from 7,000 to 10,000 cases of forced conversion to Islam. It is our duty to save them." *«The Observer», 5 June 1994*

(cited in Paul Marshall-Lela Gilbert, Their blood cries out)

Chapter One

THE GREAT SLAUGHTERHOUSE

"Shut his mouth"

Soviet prosecutor Vychinski about Bishop Suciú who was taken and horribly tortured until his death

«We will ensure that people of these species (***the martyrs***) be forgotten"

- Himmler

Christianity has spread throughout the world in an unexpected and astonishing way, but there are those who maintain that its affirmation is mostly due to the Edict of Constantine in 313.C., therefore it would be the result of the support of the imperial power. How are things?

According to the Acts of the Apostles (1, 14-15) a few weeks after the Crucifixion - which took place on 7 April of the year 30 - there were around 120 Christians in Jerusalem.

Subsequent passages in Acts speak of a few thousand Christians around 50.

But is it possible to reconstruct in detail what happened? An American sociologist of religion, Rodney Stark, tried. By applying the models that he uses today to study new religious movements to available historical information, he managed to define a progression that goes from 1,000 Christians in the year 40 (0.0017 percent of the entire population of the Empire,

estimated at 60 million), to 1,400 in the year 50, to 7,530 in the year 100, to approximately 40,500 in 150, to 217,800

of the year 200, which corresponded to 0.36 percent of the population of the Roman Empire. We find the sensational leap forward around the year 250, with 1,171,000 Christians (1.9 percent), while in 300 we are already at 6 million 299,000 (10.5 percent of the population). 1

With a special concentration in the metropolises of the Empire, starting from Rome, and therefore visibility and an even more pronounced influence. A resounding success from which Stark draws this conclusion: «The conversion of Constantine should be seen rather as a response to this massive exponential growth (of Christianity), rather than as its cause»²

So much so that, in Stark's calculations, we find in the year 350 approximately 33 million and 880 thousand Christians (56.5 percent of the population of the Empire), but this is exactly the same percentage of growth that Christianity had before 300.

It was therefore not the government's favor that determined the affirmation of Christianity, but if anything it was this affirmation that determined the political openness of the imperial authorities towards the Church. The factors can then be identified behind such a massive spread of the Gospel? And what influence did the persecutions that the Church had to suffer have - positively or negatively?

*1 These are the data provided by RODNEY STARK, professor at the University of Washington, on p. 7 of his volume **The Rise of Christianity. How the obscure, marginal Jesus Movement became the dominant religious force in the western world in a few centuries** (Harper Collins 1997).*

2 Idem, p. 10.

The "secret" of the Church

The spread of Christianity «was not the result of a planned activity»³ or of particular proselytizing techniques. It is true that the Christians - without knowing it - used what Stark calls "the best of all marketing techniques: the person-to-person relationship." But because this was the very dynamic of Christianity. Thus he had burst into the world, ever since that first meeting of John and Andrew with Jesus, in the spring of the year 28, on the banks of the Jordan, in Bethany (*John* 1.37).

Many years later, the Christians, in Rome, in Alexandria, in Milan, in Smyrna, in Cordoba, in Damascus, in London, they continued to have the same human dynamic as Giovanni and Andrea: «united and motivated» they simply «invited their friends, relatives, neighbors to share the "good news"»⁴. It was the sharing of a political project the established power is questioned. Stark, in his very interesting study, tries to list and explain what they were the "profane" factors, i.e. sociologically analysable, of that expansion (without excluding in principle, but not even considering it a subject of study for the sociologist, what for Christians is the divine force). Here is a summary of the elements he identifies.

First of all, Christianity was not a movement of marginalized and oppressed as many have written, starting with Friedrich Engels. Indeed, Christians from the beginning

they made conversions and had friends even in the classes

3 JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Looking at Christ, Jaca Book, 1989, p. 31. 4 RODNEY STARK, op. cit., p. 208.*

superiors (even "in the imperial family", which made it possible to mitigate repression and persecution). Moreover, a profoundly innovative movement that had not also penetrated the intellectual, economic and political elite could not have had such success.

Furthermore, the Jewish world played a "central role" in the spread of Christianity, including the large communities of the diaspora which - contrary to what is believed is believed until now - they laid the foundations for the Church and passed to a notable extent into Christianity, not only at the beginning, but for several centuries. Another element, according to Stark, can be grasped by analyzing major moments of social crisis, such as recurring epidemics. The sociologist demonstrates - numbers in hand - that the simple reciprocal self that Christians gave each other, an attitude unknown in the pagan world, decreased greatly, among

their mortality also amazed the pagans who converted.

Another element of success was the particular spread of Christianity among women (who for the first time they saw their great dignity proclaimed, unknown to the pagan world⁵). In ancient society, abortion and infanticide were widespread and especially affected female children. The prohibition of these practices among Christians led to a greater demographic increase - compared to declining societies - and an increase in the percentage of women who then, once married, "dragged" others into the new faith within their families. Christianity spread especially in the cities,

5 Cr. EVA CANTARELLA, *Passatopoximo, Feltrinelli, Milan 1996.*

where Jewish communities already lived, and the metropolitan centers in those centuries were chaotic, sordid places, dangerous, brutal, so that coming across a Christian community meant finding oneself in an oasis of friendship and humanity. Without having foreseen it, Christianity changed the social face of cities. To the homeless and the poor "Christianity offered charity, human warmth and hope", to foreigners and uprooted people it gave a point of belonging, orphans and widows found in it a new type of family, in the face of violent ethnic hatreds, Christianity gave rise to an unprecedented social solidarity and in the face of the disorganization of cities when epidemics, fires, or catastrophes such as earthquakes broke out, "Christianity offered an efficient treatment service".

For centuries people had had to face the unhappiness and harshness of life alone, but "when Christianity broke out its superior ability to deal with these chronic problems soon became evident and played a great role in its ultimate triumph"⁶. Together with his clarity in rejecting any syncretism and any "double belonging", even at the cost of unpopularity and hostility.

Stark adds that the looming persecutions made Christians more cohesive and kept those at bay who, at all times, join groups only out of opportunism. But he adds another valuable observation. Torments and martyrdom freely accepted, in order not to deny Jesus, they impressed many pagans from Christians - in some cases even from teenagers. Above all for the dignity with which they faced suffering and death. It was said, then and later, that it was

6 RODNEY STARK, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

of irrational, masochistic, pathological behavior. Stark discovered that that behavior had its own rationality, only that it was a different rationality from the pagan one.

Everyone acts based on the advantage they intend to achieve. Christians were certain of obtaining a priceless and eternal reward - Paradise - in exchange for an ephemeral good such as life. Stark believes that the "risk" element of such a bet becomes reasonably acceptable if it is not experienced individually, but within human relationships where "there is credible evidence" of "tangible benefits", where there are those "testifies to an experience of personal rebirth after conversion" or even "who can report having benefited from miracles". 7 Therefore "martyrs are the most credible indicators of the value of a religion". 8

But martyrdom in itself is not enough to convince, because it is not exclusive to Christians and can also be due (we see it today) to irrational and inhuman fanaticism. The truly formidable weapon of the Christianity was what Stark calls his "doctrine." To a humanity that had always represented the gods to itself

7 A similar dynamic is indicated by this meditation by Don Luigi Giussani on martyrdom: «Christmas and Saint Stephen's lesson in sacrifice, but what is the means to live it? Saint Stephen shows us this with his passionate dedication to the Lord Jesus. It could be expressed like this: "You must not feel alone". When two faithful spouses feel close to each other; when parents feel close to their children and children feel close to their parents, isn't their strength in the face of sacrifice increased a hundredfold? When true friends feel united and united in their Ideal, doesn't their strength in the face of every obstacle magnify immeasurably? Oh brothers, and husband and parent and child and friends are nothing more than a sensitive expression of blessed Christ, 'invisible but true husband and father and mother and son and friend, always awake beside us with infinitely caring affection to support us with his divine strength' (homily for Saint Stephen the protomartyr, 26 December 1944, in «Tracce», December 2001).

8 RODNEY STARK, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-174.

like "cruel children" who enjoy making men suffer, hearing about a God who loves human beings (and induces people to love each other) was an absolute novelty truly full of charm. Christianity "taught that a merciful God asks to men to be merciful" towards everyone, "beyond any boundaries of family or ethnic belonging".

In an inhumane and cruel era in which children could normally be made to die, people fled from illness and death, even abandoning their parents or siblings, in an era in which mass entertainment was represented by bloody massacres

of the circus and the torments inflicted on others, Christianity simply reawakened the human in people. "What Christianity ultimately offered converts was nothing less than their humanity." 9

The strength of this novelty, simple and fascinating, yes proved to be formidable despite the persecutions and the laws that sometimes forced clandestinity and martyrdom.

In fact, from the beginning - inexplicably - Christianity has had to suffer harsh persecution, discrimination and massacres. Jesus was crucified on April 7 of the year 30. Immediately after him Stephen, James and then Peter, Paul, Andrew, John and then many other martyrs, starting with those of the first Church of Rome, decimated by Nero on charges of having caused the devastating fire of 19 July 64.

As Tacitus 10 writes, it was indeed the mad emperor who main suspect and as the rumor spread more and more, «Nero invented the culprits to stop it

9 RODNEY STARK, *op. cit.*, p. 215. 10 TACITUS, *Annals*, XV, 38,1 and 44, 2-5.

and subjected those whom the people called Christians to very refined punishments." Thus "a great multitude" were put to death. «And ridicule was added to those who died, so that, covered in feral skins, they perished, torn to pieces by dogs, or hung on crosses and set on fire, they were burned alive, at sunset, like torches for the night". 11

That large number of martyrs then became a true ocean of victims over the centuries and especially in the twentieth century. And although in many countries Christianity has been overwhelmed and erased, today, in the first months of the third millennium, the name of Jesus Christ is the most invoked on earth. The new millennium, born on a planet that has

11 Executioners, even the most bloodthirsty, did not enjoy bad press during the 20th century. Even with Nero, multiple rehabilitations were attempted. On Sunday 9 December 2001, on the front page of the most authoritative Italian newspaper, the «Corriere della Sera», a headline recalled a "scoop" of the cultural pages: «Nero innocent. Christian extremists burned Rome." Above was the formula: "The historian". Was it a sensational documentary discovery capable of overturning the truth accepted until now? No. Luciano Canfora's article reported that a certain Gerhard Baudy had formulated this hypothesis from the screens of Channel 4 and without any supporting material. Canfora, while admitting that it is "a very old hypothesis", already refuted for years, attributes some validity to it by making Tacitus say something completely different from what he wrote. According to Canfora, in fact, in the cited passage from the *Annals*, Tacitus «deals with the fire of Rome and says that, of the Christians, "those who confessed" were arrested». Naturally Canfora recognizes that "confessions can be obtained in various ways", but still refers to the "conviction that Tacitus shows he has regarding the guilt of those Christians". Except that Tacitus says the exact opposite. When he talks about confession he is not referring to the fire, but to those who confessed their membership of the Church and - despite despising Christians - completely exonerates them. The fire - writes Tacitus - is "a disaster, it is not known whether due to chance or to the perfidy of the emperor". And since the idea that it was Nero who had set the city on fire did not lose ground, "to put an end to the public rumours, Nero invented the culprits and subjected those whom the people called Christians to very refined punishments".

In short, he made them scapegoats (after all, their innocence also appears certain from the writings of Pliny, Suetonius and Dio Cassius). After all, the purpose of the sortie of

Canfora's aim was to demonstrate that Christians expressed a "fundamentalist fanaticism" identical to that of Bin Laden and that they looked to Rome just as today's Bin Ladens look to New York.

having reached 6 billion inhabitants, it sees for the first time the number of Catholics exceeding one billion and the overall number of Christians approaching two billion. It would seem that the news of that novelty, which moved us two thousand years ago, has truly reached the ends of the earth.

Never numbers don't tell everything.

Statistics year 2000

Total Christians

1,920,000,000

Catholics

1,050,000,000

Eastern Christians (Orthodox)

170,000,000

Evangelical Christians - Anglicans

500,000,000

Other Christians

200,000,000

Total Muslims (Shia, Sunni etc.)

1,150,000,000

Jews

20,000,000

Buddhists

350,000,000

Hindus

800,000,000

A Christianity of immense dimensions is therefore entering the third millennium but appears to be in serious crisis in the West. Furthermore, the twentieth century saw the decimation of many Churches. Tertullian argued that *«sanguis martyrum est semen christianorum»*. Martyrdom has always been considered by the Church the highest and most sublime form of Christian testimony and has been considered one with the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. 12 The persecution of the first centuries was a dramatic circumstance that encouraged even more unity among all Christian communities, mutual charity and prayer. 13

12 From IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (Epistula ad Romanos, 2, 2; 4, 1; 7,3) to Lumen Gentium n. 42.

13 Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, in 252 wrote among other things to the Church of Rome tried by persecution: «In moments of persecution and in difficulties, let us support each other with mutual charity» (Epistulae, 60, 1 ff.).

Many believe that persecutions and martyrs are about first of all the history of the first Christian centuries or - subsequently - the victims of the Muslim conquests of Christian lands or the fate of the missionaries in the wild lands of Africa or Asia. Or they think of famous martyrs such as Saint Boniface (Frisia, Anno Domini 751), Thomas Becket (England, 1170), the 800 martyrs of Otranto (massacred by Mohammed II in 1480), Thomas More (England, 1535) and Cardinal Fischer

(in the same circumstances) or Paolo Miki (who died crucified in Nagasaki in 1597) or the Jesuits killed in the evangelization of the Amazon or Father Daniele Comboni, evangelizer of Africa.

But, contrary to appearances, it was a lot the twentieth century was the century of the greatest slaughter of Christians. 14 In the period from the French Revolution to today, but in particular in the twentieth century, persecutions never seen before in 2000 years have been unleashed. The vastness, duration and quantity of victims. As we will see in the following statistical table, if in 2 millennia approximately 70,000,000 Christians were killed for their faith, as many as 45,500,000 (approximately 65 percent of the total) are martyrs of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, this global persecution of Christianity is still ongoing, although it is mostly ignored by the mass media and by Western Christians themselves.

Olga Mattera began an essay in the magazine «Limes» like this: «Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world today. It has thousands of victims; his faithful

14 The historical evidence of the phenomenon was underlined and explained by Professor Ernesto Galli della Loggia in an editorial which appeared in the «Corriere della Sera» (14 May 2000) with the title: A century against God.

they suffer torture and humiliation of all kinds. But Western public opinion, precisely that of Christian "culture", does not give this drama any attention, except in limited circles" 15

This is certainly not true as regards John Paul II who himself came from a history of persecution and martyrdom 16 and throughout his pontificate he spent himself in every way to bring comfort and care to the most distant and forgotten Christian communities. 17 But it is true if we instead consider mass media, intellectual and theological elites. And it is especially true when the persecutors are communist or revolutionary regimes. 18

15 OLGA MATTERA, Anti-Christian persecutions in the world, in «Limes», 1/2000, D. 79.

16 In September 1953, when Cardinal Wyszyński was arrested (he was released in 1956), 9 bishops were in prison or "imprisoned", around 300 priests and 54 religious were dead or missing, while another 2,700 were in prison, in exile or deported and approximately 2,000 churches, 840 convents and monasteries, 85 Catholic schools, all charitable works, Catholic printing presses and bookshops were closed, and finally 80 percent of the Church's assets were confiscated. It should not be forgotten that Father Popielusko's martyrdom dates back to the 1980s.

17 For his repeated and pressing interventions, unheard and ignored, see DIDIER RANCE, Un siècle de témoins, Le Serment, 2000, pp. 47-60. A beautiful meditation on the persecution in the past and present of the Church is that of ALESSANDRO MAGGIOLINI, Meglio il martirio, Mondadori, Milan 1995.

18 This episode told by a great missionary, Father Piero Gheddo, is exemplary: «Even a holy man like Father Davide Turollo, of whom I have great and positive memories (we loved each other even though we argued at times), mythologized communist regimes and socialism. In November 1973 I was invited to the "Christians" congress in solidarity with Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos" in Turin. I told what I had seen, amidst whistles and protests, as was normal at that time. Then Turollo takes me into a dressing room of that theater and in his loud voice tells me: "Also if what you say is true, you are off track anyway. Don't you understand that you damage the socialist idea? Because, Piero, remember that socialism is the only hope of poor peoples and socialism will triumph."

Thinking about it, I'm not even too shocked, because I remember that at the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, an Italian missionary magazine published an editorial that literally said: "Communism has been defeated. And now who will take the defenses of the poor?" (in David and Goliath, book interview with Roberto Beretta, San Paolo, Milan 2001, p. 209).

Didier Rance in his volume *Un siècle de témoins* has told what happened to Bulgarian Father Gavril Bielovejdov - a man who had endured eleven terrible years of lager - when he came to Rome at the end of the 1980s. He had been invited to tell the ordeal of the Bulgarian Church in a pontifical university where he himself had studied, many years before and whose rector had been his fellow student. Father Gavril therefore narrated the martyrdom with simplicity and precision of many priests, the cruel tortures (known personally), the concentration camps and the faith and invincible hope of those Christians.

Leaving the classroom he meets an Italian priest who tells him he says: «Next time don't tell nonsense like you did today». Father Gavril, dismayed, can only say: «And why? I only reported the truth." And the Italian: «Come on! My students just told me: but this priest is telling lies: if he believes that we are stupid enough to believe him.. ».

In reality there were also Christians who did not respond to the victims with contempt, but with pity and charity. Many meritorious initiatives for decades have involved thousands of simple believers, like the splendid one organization "Car to the Church that suffers" founded by Father Werenfried van Straaten. But the indifference of many - especially of the intellectual class - became almost intolerance in the nineties, in which - communism fell in Europe - we were convinced that the martyrdom of the Church had definitively ceased.

It was the United States Congress, in the summer of 1997, that sensationally denounced the persecutions underway against Christians. According to an American intellectual,

Michael Horowitz, a son of those people Jew who knows persecution well, for governments and the mass media the idea that Christians are victims today "is simply not conceivable. Arm yourself with the knowledge of the sins committed in the name of Christianity and horribly unaware of the fundamental role of Christianity in Western history, modern-day elites are led to think of Christians as those who persecute, not as victims." As - adds Horowitz, recalling some noble causes - «an intellectual elite which in its interventions has had the Buddhists of Tibet, the Jews of the former Soviet Union and the Muslims of Bosnia in its care finds it easy to reject the idea that Christians can be equally victims». 19

Yet they too are persecuted. It's crazy that people don't want to see him. Even more inexplicable if we consider that the Church, with its works of charity, its global call to solidarity and brotherhood and its missionaries, thousands of men and women who give their lives to others, does not pursue designs of

power, teaches respect for public authorities, welcomes and helps populations with enthusiasm non-Christians who are in need anywhere in the world, without ever making any distinctions. 20

In the four corners of the world the Church, as Charles Péguy wrote, is truly the great oak under the

19 MICHAEL HOROWITZ, preface to PAUL MARSHALL - LELA GILBERT, *Their Blood cries out*, World Publishing, Dallas 1997, pp. XXI-XXIV.

20 For example, during the international crisis relating to Afghanistan, on 20 December 2001 the CEI allocated three billion, coming from eight per thousand, to the humanitarian aid of the Afghan populations (who are all Muslims). They are added to the 30 billion already allocated by the international Caritas, together with 1 billion and 435 million collected in churches on the day of prayer on December 14th. All this although in Afghanistan it is still not even allowed to celebrate mass.

which all the desolations of the world find shelter and shelter, the embrace always and always ready for any human being. It is therefore difficult to say why so much hatred and ferocity are still unleashed against a defenseless human group, so devoid of social or political danger and so capable of solidarity. Whatever historical or social explanation we have attempted to give appears dramatically inadequate in the face of the gravity of the events and in any case there is none that explains the phenomenon in its entirety, at the most diverse latitudes, under opposing political regimes.

So for now let's stick to the facts.

Shocking data

What the twentieth century was in Christian history as a whole and what is currently happening are the two aspects that emerge from these figures which we take from the World Christian Encyclopedia (second edition, 2 vols.) by David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, Todd M. Johnson, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Total people AD 33 - 2000

Total number of people born since AD 33: 36 billion, 631 million

Total number of people evangelized since AD 33: 13 billion, 366 million (33 percent of all humanity)

Total number of Christians since AD 33: 8 billion, 816 million (24 percent of humanity)

Total number of martyrs killed since AD 33: 69 million 420,000

Percentage of martyrs among the total Christians: 0.8 percent

Percentage of martyrs among Christian leaders: 2.0 percent

Historical vision AD 33 - 2000

600 major episodes of martyrdom in 20 centuries 76

with more than 100 thousand martyrs for each 27

with more than 500 thousand martyrs for each 15

with more than 1 million martyrs for each

Average number of martyrs for each episode of martyrdom: 115,000

Places of martyrdom: in 220 countries

Situation in AD 2000

Martyrs in the twentieth century (1900-2000): 45 million and 400 thousand
Martyrs since 1950: 13 million and 300 thousand
Annual average of martyrs since 1950: 278 thousand per year
Martyrs of recent years: 171 thousand per year
Martyrs of the current year (2000): 160 thousand
Countries heavily involved in AD 2000: 50

Confession of victims in AD 2000 (average annual number of martyrs)

Catholics of Rome:
Protestants:
Orthodox:
Indigenous Christians of Color:
Protestant Marginalists:
Anglicans and Old Catholics:
100,000
30,000
14,000
10,000
5,000
1,000
Total martyrs per year: 160,000

Long-term effects on evangelism

Countries with a long history of martyrs, now fully evangelized: 210 countries
with many martyrs, today with strong growth of the Church: 40 countries with
few or no martyrs, with no current growth of the Church
Church: 30
Leaders of the Church martyred in 20 centuries: 3,000 Martyrs among
lay people serving the Church in 20 centuries: 400,000

For every martyr in history (without causal relationship between the two data)

People on Earth: 531
People evangelized: 193
Christians converted: 127
New people evangelized every year per martyr (1990 - 2000): 690

So according to this study - the most authoritative,
but obviously not to be taken as revealed truth - currently
around 160,000 people die every year
because of their faith in Jesus Christ. It is disconcerting to think
that today the cases of martyrdom reach such exorbitant
figures every year. 21 It should also be noted that Barrett does
not use the term "martyr" in the specific sense of the Church's
canonization processes, but defines it as «a believer in Christ,
in a situation of witness, who loses his life prematurely as

result of the hostility of other men"22.

This is a phenomenon of terrible dimensions, however
this disconcerts the little interest of the major humanitarian
organisations, the silence of free countries and the UN (if not its action
in favor of those illiberal regimes) and the suppression carried out by
the mass media, finally 'indifference
of Western Christians ready to launch solidarity
campaigns or prayer vigils for any social issue,

but almost never for Christians

21 I believe (or at least I hope) that this estimate is excessively high, but I have no tools to propose different numbers, nor do I know of any equally authoritative studies that provide lower figures that can be quoted. Moreover, it is there on the contrary, those - numbers in hand - maintain that «these data would seem largely underestimated» (PAOLO TAUFER, L'espansionismo Islamica, in «La Tradizione Catholic», n. 2, 2001, p. 52, note 49) and even considers the number of victims to be higher.

22 As it is easy to argue, the Christian definition of "martyr" is completely different from that of Islam, although the same term is used.

persecuted, dealing with whom they consider almost execrable as it would undermine the "ecumenical dialogue" or force us to talk about regimes and ideologies which it seems should never be criticized.

When circumstances - rarely - bring the spotlight on this submerged world, as happened after the massacres in America on 11 September, but also before (on 14 February 2001, for example «Le Monde» dedicated the entire second page to anti-Christian persecutions) then the Catholic press must also face the topic.

Apart from rare exceptions, such as the weekly «Tempi», he often does it in a singular way. An example for everyone (but many other publications could be cited). The Pauline monthly magazine «Jesus» of January 2002 announced on its cover a martyrology with this title: «Under the sign of the cross». However, one thing is striking in that portrait gallery proposed by «Jesus»: there is not a single Christian victim of the communist or Islamic regimes, which are the vast majority. Not even one. How is it possible? An oversight? Or what else?

We are rightly talking about the victims of right-wing regimes. Two monks who did not die as martyrs, but who had problems, are then celebrated there with ecclesiastical authority (the usual bad Church) and finally a UN secretary who died in a plane crash. We go so far as to list a Muslim among those who "have sown the word of the Gospel in the heart of the people of God". But there is no trace of the enormous slaughter of Christians perpetrated by communism, nor of the anti-Christian persecutions of Islam. While the memory of the sins of which Christians themselves have been guilty is never lacking.

Another example. Don Luigi's Abel Group Ciotti publishes every year from Feltrinelli a large volume of data, research, statistics and chronologies relating to the most serious and dramatic social events in Italy and the world. Let's consider the edition **Social yearbook 2000**, a text of 762 dense pages, really full of documentation, a useful and accurate work albeit very much politically oriented. They range from the chapter on AIDS to the one on the environment, from prisons to mafias, from drugs to immigration, poverty, conflicts and rights. But there is no trace of anti-Christian persecutions or more generally of religious persecutions and their thousands of victims. Just a few flashes inserted into the chronologies. Yet there are chapters dedicated to the death penalty in the United States and to armaments, to

globalization and Third World debt. But not to those derelicts forgotten by everyone. The drama of Christians does not seem to exist. The social question becomes the exclusive field of interest. There is therefore a Catholicism which, according to Gianni Baget Bozzo, "is only concerned with being on the side of the poor, but not of the poor Christians".

Yet Paul Marshall in the volume *Their Blood cries out*, cites at least 60 countries where Christians suffer persecution. «In general» he concludes «we can say that, currently, from 200 to 250,000,000 Christians are persecuted because of their faith in Christ, and another 400,000,000 suffer significant restrictions on their religious freedom». 23

So if Barrett had calculated in 1980 that 605,000,000 Christians «live under political restrictions

23 PAUL MARSHALL - LELA GILBERT, op. cit., p. 255.

of religious freedom", of which 225,000,000 "experience harsh impediments to religious practice, persecution and harassment", Marshall notes that "the figure current should be more or less the same." 24 Within this immense persecuted Christianity - which is almost not newsworthy in the West - it is estimated that every year around 160,000 people lose their lives as a result of persecution. After all, according to the calculations of Fides (agency of the Vatican Congregation De Propaganda Fide) in response to the 115 Catholic missionaries who had lost their lives violently in the period 1980-1989, we had 604 killed in the decade 1990-2000. 25 A particularly high figure because it includes the 248 missionaries murdered in Rwanda in 1994, but which must be considered above all as revealing an increasing trend. Unfortunately confirmed by the data relating to the year 2001 which Fides summarizes in 33 Catholic missionaries killed, including priests, nuns, seminarians and lay people. 26 Bernardo Cervellera's comment reveals the worsening of the situation: «Until 10-15 years ago the missionaries were respected and loved for being representatives of spiritual values. Today we see them only as helpless prey, easy to hit because, as we know, missionaries do not carry weapons and do not respond with revenge." After all, these 33 names from 2001 - Cervellera specifies -

24 Idem, p. 254. It should be remembered that the 1980s and 1990s saw the explosion of the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism which influenced, in an illiberal and violent sense towards Christians, the policies of dozens of Muslim countries (See SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, Lo clash of civilisations, Garzanti, Milan 2000, pp. 154-172).

25 Fides, 5 January 2001. 26 Fides, 29 December 2001.

«they are only the representatives of a long army of the Lamb (Rev 7,9-14) who throughout the world was ready to give his life for his Lord and for men»

In fact, behind them are - to mention only the cases of which the mass media reported - the 16 Christians killed

in the church of Bahawalpur, in Pakistan, the several hundreds killed in Nigeria, in Jos and Kano, those murdered in the Moluccas, in Sulawesi or in Buru (since January 1999 the violence perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists has caused the death of around 15,000 people? 27), Christians killed in communist regimes, but also the victims of the violence still ongoing in India against Christians by Hindu fundamentalists. 28 The 2000 Report and the 2001 Report of "Aid to the Church in Need" report an impressive series of violence and also

massacres perpetrated against Christians. 29

The massacres deserve a separate chapter, such as the one perpetrated in East Timor 30 or the one still underway in Sudan where due to the forced Islamization pursued by the

27 Fides, 9 November 2001. According to the Mina agency (17 November 2001), moreover, since 19 January 1999, the date the violence began, «there have been cases of mass conversions imposed by Muslims on Christians. It is estimated that over 500,000 people have been forced to abandon their land to seek refuge in safer places.»

28 A small example. On 22 December 2001 «'High Court of Gujrat (Western State of India) urged the local authorities to adopt adequate security measures» (Mina, 22 December 2001) to protect the Christian community from violence (over 400 episodes in that region, since 1998).

29 Even though India is a democratic country, it must also be said that there are laws that pose serious impediments to the conversion to Christianity by members of the lower classes.

30 In 25 years of Indonesian occupation (Indonesia is a Muslim country, while East Timor is a Catholic region) around 200,000 Timorese have died, a terrifying number considering that the total population today is 800,000 inhabitants. And again in 1999, before the referendum for independence, carried out thanks to international pressure (after years of total indifference), thousands were estimated to have been killed by Indonesian troops in recent months.

Khartoum regime approximately 2,000,000 men, women and children have died in several decades

Many cases leave no trace in the news. We may learn about the novice Hyacinthe Marthe, of the Daughters of Charity, who found herself between 1996 and 1997 in the hell of Zaire in whose forests she saved 500 children, before being massacred with them, but «who we know" asked Didier Rance "of the anguish of those Christian farmers who, in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Turkey, see their twelve-thirteen year old daughters taken from school, forcibly married to old Muslim notables and murdered to the death of these?". 31

The indifference with which discrimination, persecution, violence and death inflicted on Christian populations who are normally peaceful, supportive and refractory to violence is impressive. And it is even more extraordinary to see how many Christians of our time, with their families, are willing to run mortal risks or accept daily harassment, persecution and even martyrdom so as not to deny Jesus Christ. When such large figures are identified, we inevitably end up in abstraction, due to our mental inability to represent those quantities. The concreteness of every single tragedy that would ask to be told is lost.

It is therefore necessary to remember that each of those

martyrs and of those millions of persecuted people, is a concrete human being, with a name and a face, with his life and his affections, who has parents and children, who suffers exactly like us the physical and psychological tortures, the humiliations, the discrimination against him and his family, e

31 DIDIER RANCE, *Un siècle de témoins, Le Serment*, 2000, p. 193.

he experiences threats, attacks, the cruelties of torturers and violent death with the same terror as us.

On the other hand, neither does the killing of missionaries Italians and Europeans, an annual bulletin, manages to do no. chick. «The killing of these martyrs» observes Cervellera «does not cause a stir», but they «are the sign that love is possible and that the earth belongs to Christ, not to violence and terror».

A look at the twentieth century

Before describing the current situation in detail, it is necessary to take a look at the century that has just passed which saw the most enormous massacre of Christians taking place. The almost unknown beginning of the "century of martyrdom"

it occurs in China, in the very first months of the twentieth century, when the strong patriotic and xenophobic feelings that exploded there against foreign powers (Japanese and Western), who interfere heavily in the country, targeted the most vulnerable and defenseless foreigners, the

missionaries and with them the Chinese Christians.

And in the so-called "Boxer Rebellion" that during the siege of the foreign legations in Beijing, 82 foreigners (including 6 children) and hundreds of Chinese Christians were killed. Also in the violent persecution that follows «five bishops, thirty-one European religious people, more than one hundred Chinese religious people, around one hundred and ninety Protestant pastors and their families, at least 30,000 Chinese faithful (Catholics, mostly, but also 2,000 Protestants) died». 32 The worst was yet to hit China - and the Chinese Church: the bloody communist hurricane

32 ANDREA RICARDI, *The century of martyrdom*, Mondadori, Milan 2000, pp. 466 and 194.

Because the greatest number of victims, in this century of massacres, was undoubtedly caused by communism. 33 It is impossible and even unfair to attempt to describe it in summary such an immense and interminable carnage, 34 which has no equal in Christian history. It should be clarified, however, that we must speak of victims of "communism" and not of "Stalinism" because Terror and Horror began already with Lenin 35 and ruthlessly aimed at eradicating the Christian faith

33 The overall calculation of the human cost of communism is still to be done. An estimate was attempted by ROBERT CONQUEST in *Il grande Terrore* (Mondadori, Milan 1970, p. 735). He calculated around 20 million victims for the 23 years of Stalin's regime, but added that "it is almost certainly too low a figure and would perhaps require to be increased by 50 percent or so". In fact, Aleksandr Solzenitzyn updates the calculations and claims that from the October Revolution to 1959, 66 million victims were claimed in the Soviet Union (*Gulag Archipelago*, vols. III-IV, p. 12, Mondadori, Milan 1995). A figure which he then - in the famous speech to the Duma in 1991 - corrected to 60 million. In the volume *The black book of communism* (Mondadori, Milan 1998), what many

controversy it has created, in reality it gives a minimal evaluation of the human costs of communism. The editor Stéphane Courtois, in the initial essay, speaks of around 100 million overall victims, although he specifies that this is a "largely approximate" figure. A figure that absolutely needs to be revised upwards if one only considers that at 20 million deaths are attributed to 70 years of history of the Soviet Union and "only" 65 million victims to Communist China.

For China, reliable studies actually calculate up to 150,000,000 victims (see EUGENIO CORTI, The communist experiment, Ares, 1991, pp. 85-96). Then there is Eastern Europe, Indochina (Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos), North Korea, Cuba, Africa. In any case, even for minimalist estimates it is difficult to go below the overall figure of 100 million victims.

34 Since I cannot indicate hundreds of texts here, I suggest - only in passing - the volume by Irina Osipova, If the world hates you (La Casa di Matriona, 1997) and the beautiful series «T'estimoni», a series of small volumes that the same publisher, in collaboration with "Aid to the Church in Need", is publishing, each dedicated to a witness of the Christian faith in the great communist persecution. They are the first building blocks of the Acta martyrum of the 20th century.

35 Already in January 1918 Lenin declared the need to "purge the Russian land of all sorts of harmful insects" (LENIN, Complete Works, V ed., vol. 35, p. 204). And on 19 January 1918 Patriarch Tikhon denounced the Terror unleashed by the new Bolshevik power: «Every day we hear the echo of horrible and cruel massacres of which innocent people are victims... Come back to yourselves, senseless people, stop the your massacres." It was only the beginning of the great slaughter.

Trotsky has the "honour" of being the first to use the term in the twentieth century "concentration camp", in an order dated 4 June 1918, as they note

from Russia. There is no doubt that this is the objective when - as Ernesto Galli della Loggia notes - «over 200,000 monks and priests of all confessions»³⁶ and there is no doubt that this ferocity and this objective are inherent to communism from its beginning when we read, written by Lenin in March 1922 (therefore with the civil war now over), sentences like this: «And right now, when in the regions where famine is raging people are eating human flesh, and hundreds not thousands of corpses littering the streets, it is precisely now that we can - and therefore must - proceed with the confiscation of the Church's assets **with the wildest and most ruthless energy**...); we must give battle to the reactionary clergy in the most decisive and merciless manner, sweeping away the

its resistance **with such brutality that it will be remembered for decades and decades to come**»³⁷

The Catholic Church in Urs was wiped out by Terror: in 1918 it had 2 million faithful and more than 900 priests and in 1939 it was completely dispersed. ³⁸ Robert Royal states, in **The Catholic Martyrs**

Nekric and Geller in their History of the USSR (Rizzoli, Milan 1984) on p. 69. Other emblematic pearls in the following pages. On 9 August 1918, when the first "camps" were already filling, Lenin ordered the establishment of «implacable mass terror against kulaks, popes and White Guards; lock up suspects in a concentration camp outside the city" (p. 70). In 1922 Lenin had heavy repressive measures inserted into the Penal Code against those who "objectively help or can help" the world bourgeoisie. "Objective help" or "unintentional help" means mass terror: it is the power that decides at its own discretion who hit and eliminate (p. 72).

36 ERNESTO GALLI DELLA LOGGIA, Millions of victims await a response, in «Liberal», August 1997, pp. 9-13. This essay also offers a definitive refutation of the generally "denialist" theses of those who dump the

responsibility for the Terror lies solely with Stalin.

37 Idem.

38 See ANDREA S. COLOMBO, Sanguis martyrum, «Tempi», 17 May 2000.

of the twentieth century, that in the first eight years, between 1917 and 1925, 200 thousand Catholics disappeared into thin air. But of course it is the Russian Orthodox Church that has had the greatest number of martyrs. 39 Moreover, the great slaughter that began with Lenin 40 continued in all latitudes where communism imposed itself after Stalin's death. Everywhere, from Eastern Europe to Mao's China, from Africa to Cambodia, from Ethiopia to Vietnam, the great massacre has yielded horrendous replicas (and the persecution against Christians is still ongoing in communist regimes: China, Laos , North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba).

Zef Simoni, auxiliary bishop of Scutari, twelve years old closed in the extermination camp of Spac, in Albania, he saw priests tortured and killed in the most diverse ways: «Subjected to electric shocks, they had to walk mined barefoot on hot metal plates or were placed upside down in barrels filled with freezing water. Their mouths were filled with salt or they were forced to ingest medicines harmful to the nervous system. I remember that the Jesuit Gjon Karma was buried alive in a coffin. The Franciscan Frano Kiri remained tied to a corpse for a few days, until they began

39 ANDREA RICCARDI, op. cit., pp. 33-34, summarizes some data: 300 bishops, more than 50,000 clergy and an unknown number of monks and nuns were killed. According to the Moscow Patriarchate, at least 350 thousand Orthodox Christians suffered persecution for their faith until 1941 (150 thousand were arrested in 1937 alone, 80 thousand of whom were shot). But overall there were no million Christians killed for various reasons.

40 The strategists of the communist butcher's shop have never had difficulty finding the "theoretical" justification for the use of violence in Karl's texts Marx. The ending of the Communist Manifesto reads: «Communists disdain to hide their opinions and intentions. They openly declare that their goals can only be achieved by violently overthrowing every existing social order. Let the ruling classes also tremble before a communist revolution."

to release the dead person's fluids. Others were hanged, beheaded or drowned in a swamp." 41

And we're talking about just one communist country, moreover, among the youngest.

In addition to the massacre of Christians - without equal - carried out by communism, in the twentieth century we must remember the genocide of the Armenians (Christians), perpetrated with unprecedented atrocity by the Turkish regime 42, 1,500,000 victims, 2,000,000 deportees, thousands forcibly converted to Islam. 43 To the American ambassador Morgenthau who protested about this enormous slaughter, Talaat Pasha replied: «Why are you so interested in the Armenians? You Jewish site and these are Christian people. Muslims and Jews understand each other better." But Morgenthau, in his 1918 memoirs, dedicated an entire chapter to the genocide, providing precious testimony: «The great persecutions of times past" he wrote, "seem insignificant compared to the suffering endured

by the Armenians in 1915... Without any doubt the Turkish and Kurdish populace sacrificed the Armenians to please the God of Muhammad, but the men who conceived the crime had a completely different purpose, being all atheists." Another Jew, the Prague writer Franz Werfel, was responsible for the novel *The forty days of Mussa-Dagh* which tells the story

41 ANDREA COLOMBO, «Tempi», cit.

42 Curiously, only in 1987 did the European Community recognize this genocide (see the dossier on «30 Giorni» 12/2001 and UMBERTO GALIMBERTI, *Storia di un genocidio*, «la Repubblica», 16 April 1999).

43 Villages, cities and churches swept away, transformed into mosques. 14 Armenian Catholic dioceses were also cancelled, along with their pastors. The massacre of Archbishop Maloyan is exemplary. He too, as usual with Armenians, "was proposed to convert to Islam as a way of saving his life", but he replied: "or I don't renounce my Christian faith". Horrendous tortures, before death, were suffered by many pastors, such as Monsignor Khatchadourian (See ANDREA RICCARDI, *The century of martyrdom*, Mondadori, Milan 2000, pp. 275-288).

Armenian tragedy. It saw the light in 1933, just when the genocide of the Jewish people of which Morgenthau and Werfel were children was beginning to take shape - as Giovanni Ricciardi noted in «30 Days». And it is no coincidence that it is said that Hitler responded to the doubts of some collaborators about the total annihilation of the Jews with these chilling words: "Who today remembers the massacre of the Armenians?". Horrible words, which today should suggest to Christians and Jews a common duty of memory, just as Morgenthau and Werfel were able to denounce the massacre of the Armenians as a violence that concerned and threatened everyone.

Then there is the case of persecutions in Mexico revolutionary with hundreds of clergy and lay Christians tortured and massacred. 44 But the most terrifying case was undoubtedly Spain in the 1930s.

In that period, communism and Nazism seemed successful, they believed they had the world in their hands. «The failure of democracy was a common theme in political commentary» observes Vicente Carcel Ortí, «but had Christianity also failed? This was a point of contention among some influential intellectuals, especially those affected particularly favorably by the Nazi victories. Some people asked, "Why should we expect Christianity to outlast the Roman Empire?" In Berlin and others

Christianity had long been erased from Moscow." 45

They also tried to sweep it away in Spain and with one very special ferocity.

44 See ROBERT ROYAL, *The catholic martyrs of the twentieth century*, Crossroad, New York, pp. 15-42.

45 VICENTE CARCEL ORTÍ, *Raised to the honors of the altars 286 martyrs of our century*, «L'Osservatore romano», 17 October 1998.

«Never in the history of Europe and perhaps in that of the world», wrote Hugh Thomas, «has there been such fierce hatred for religion and its men». From 17 and 18 July 1936, the date of the military uprising against the republican government, the carnage became systematic: in August 2,077 ecclesiastics were massacred with

an average of 70 per day. It was only after this massacre, a year later, that, on 1 July 1937, the letter of the bishops came out who sided with the "nationals" and after that document the massacre began to diminish due to its virulence. Therefore «the letter » as Cardinal Tarancón later explained «it was the consequence of those deaths and not the opposite». A decisive question because it makes it clear that it was an inflicted martyrdom out of hatred for the Christian faith and not for political motivations.

After all, the Church, for example in Catalonia, suffered persecutions also by Right-wing forces, but it happened - in that case yes - for political and national reasons. While the massacres committed by the republicans, of Marxist, or anarchist, socialist or anticlerical inspiration, were only due to a hatred for Christianity objectively inexplicable in its sadistic ferocity.

Here is Vittorio Messori's brilliant summary: «There were cases like that of the parish priest of Navalmorel subjected to the same torture as Jesus, starting with flagellation and the crown of thorns and ending with crucifixion (but the tortured man also behaved like Christ, blessing and forgiving the anarchist and communist militiamen who tormented him). There were religious locked up in the enclosure of fighting bulls, with the ears finally being cut off as for the animals. There were priests and nuns burned alive by the hundreds.

A woman "guilty" of being the mother of two Jesuits was suffocated by having a crucifix stuck in her throat. At a certain point the front ran out of petrol, which was used in rivers to burn not only the men, but also the works of art... The house of the Salesian nuns in Madrid was attacked and set on fire and the nuns were raped and beaten to the extreme behind the accusation of giving children poisoned sweets. The bodies of the cloistered nuns were dug up and displayed in public, for mockery.

We came to rediscover Carthaginian barbarism such as tying a living person to a corpse and leaving it like that, exposed to the sun, until both decompose". 46

Overall it is estimated that in a few months 13 bishops, 4,184 priests and seminarians, 2,365 religious men, 283 nuns and an incalculable number were killed - but these are thousands - of lay Christians (perhaps guilty only of carrying a rosary in their pocket, of refusing to repeat a blasphemy or of having hidden a priest).

That they were martyred only because they were Christians is also evident from their personal stories. The 48 seminarians imprisoned, tortured and murdered one by one in Barbastro, left poignant words in which there is no trace of political motivations: «We spend the day in religious silence and preparing to die tomorrow» writes one of them «only the holy buzz prayers are heard in this room, testimony of our harsh sufferings; if we speak it is to encourage us to die as martyrs; if we pray it is to forgive our enemies. Save them, Lord, because they do not know what they are doing!

As a summary (albeit partial) you can read the memorandum drawn up by the republican minister of the

46 VITTORIO MESSORI, *Thinking about history*, Paoline, Milan 1992, pp. 513-514.

Justice, Manuel de Irujo, presented, a month after resigning as a Catholic, to the republican government of Valencia on 9 January 1937, therefore seven months before the Church took sides against the republic, confirming the fact that the bishops' stance was a consequence of the slaughter and not vice versa: «a) all the altars, images and objects of worship, with very rare exceptions, were destroyed, in most cases with grave vilification. b) All churches were closed to worship which remained totally and absolutely suspended. c) A large part of the temples were set on fire and, in Catalonia, this happened as a rule. d) Official depots and bodies received bells, chalices, monstrances, candelabras and other objects of worship, melted them down and also used the materials for war or industrial purposes. e) All types of warehouses, markets, garages, stables, accommodation, shelters and many other types of use have been installed in the churches... f) All the convents have been cleared out and

in them religious life has been suspended. Buildings, objects of worship and goods of any kind were set on fire, looted, occupied and demolished. g) Priests and religious have been arrested, thrown into prison and shot by thousands without any trial and these events, even if in smaller numbers, still occur, not only in the countryside villages, where they have been hunted down and killed wildly, but also in towns and cities. Madrid and Barcelona and other large cities count hundreds of those arrested, detained in their prisons without any other known cause other than their character as priests or religious.

b) We have reached the point of an absolute prohibition on keeping, in private, images or objects of worship."

Of course, the destruction of cathedrals and priceless works of art out of anti-Christian or anti-Catholic fury was not limited to Spain in the 1930s, nor did it begin there. 47 And in barbarity it's not the worst thing.

47 The enormous destruction of works of art perpetrated for ideological reasons is also a censored chapter of the century of genocides (there are no investigations or books). France will undergo this wave of "progress" thanks to the revolution of 1789. It was probably the largest destruction of works of art in history. The abbeys of Cluny and Citeaux - which are the womb of European civilization - were razed to the ground. With the massacres of priests and suras, the abolition of religious orders, the confiscation of all their assets, a systematic plan of destruction was also carried out: the statues of all French cathedrals were decapitated, defined as "indecent and ridiculous".

In Paris, Notre Dame and Saint-Germain-des-Prés (later transformed into an arsenal), up to Sémur-en-Auxerrois, Sens Vézelay and the other splendid Romanesque and Gothic churches of the south. Thousand-year-old churches such as that of Saint-Denis (with the saint's tomb), the Champmol charterhouse, the burial chapel of the Dukes of Burgundy (but these are only a few examples, the list would be very long) were destroyed.

In November 1793, 434 paintings in the Central Museum warehouse were destroyed and in April 1794 the Committee of Public Safety had many others burned. Candelabra, monstrances and reliquaries were taken to the Mint to be melted down (even the bronze baptismal fonts), and the large tapestries were destroyed to remove the gold and silver threads.

An irreparable and unparalleled loss that adds to the wild raids. All to "crush the infamous" as Voltaire said. But this wave of "fraternité" and "tolerance" also spread to other European countries. Then the Napoleonic armies - how

documented Paul Wescher in The Art Thefts. Napoleon and the birth of the Louvre (Einaudi) - organized a theft which produced "the largest movement of works of art in history". And by carrying out the immense raid, Italy was also greatly devastated: «It is difficult to establish exactly how many works of art of unique value were destroyed or dispersed in those days», writes Wescher, describing in detail «the systematic sacking of Rome», in addition to that of Turin, Naples and Florence.

But destruction in Italy also took place with the Risorgimento, albeit on a scale not even comparable.

In the twentieth century another revolution, the communist one, took charge of "liberating" Europe from the darkness of obscurantism and superstition that had filled the old continent with art. Thus in Moscow - for example - the Cathedral of the Redeemer was demolished and hundreds of other churches were looted and then used as stables or granaries or museums of atheism (after having burned or stolen ancient icons and sacred furnishings).

In the former East Germany, demolition has continued in recent years. Federico Zeri («La Stampa», 25 April 1991) denounced, for example, the destruction of the Pauline Church perpetrated in Leipzig in the Seventies: «His fault», wrote the art critic «was that he found himself at the center of the local university ». Which had to be Marxist. «You hear that the officials of the Leipzig Museum worked hard to get the remains of the stained glass windows and reliefs that enriched the illustrious church"

But this "agreement for crudely ideological reasons" (which - among other things -

Nazism was second to none in terms of ferocity. His fury, as is known, was unleashed above all against the Jews with the most systematic, crazy and ruthless plan of total destruction of a people known. But even Christianity - which for Nazi neo-paganism was a "Jewish product" - experienced the ferocity of the brown shirts.

The clash between Nazism and the Church began with Hitler's rise to power: at the outbreak of the war, Catholic associations and the Catholic press were swept away.⁴⁸ But then the bloody persecution and martyrdom begins. «In the twelve years of Hitler's regime» writes Andrea Riccardi, speaking only of the

led to the dynamiting of the Schloss in Berlin, the royal castle which was «the most outstanding Baroque monument in Central Europe») The West always maintained a «rigorous silence, thanks» wrote Zeri «to left-wing conformism» .

Silence also on the fire which in 1945 - after the capitulation of Berlin - "mysteriously" broke out in the museums of that city. The fire consumed 417 works, including 158 Italian masterpieces (three Caravaggios and five Paolo Veronese in flames). The Roman critic also mentioned the destruction perpetrated during the Spanish civil war, such as «the fire of the splendid cathedral of Lerida, of the Romanesque age (which was burned for three days with its sculptures, its paintings, the illuminated manuscripts and the furnishings)".

48 In reality there were also many (formally) Christians who acquiesced or even collaborated in the genocide of the Jews perpetrated by Nazism. But the Church itself was always in opposition to a phenomenon that it considered neo-pagan barbarism. The great Jewish scientist Albert Einstein wrote in December 1940 in «Time Magazine»: «Being a lover of freedom, when the revolution occurred in Germany (the advent of Hitler, N..A.) I looked with confidence at the universities knowing that these they had always prided themselves on their devotion to the cause of truth. But universities were silenced. Then I looked at the great newspaper editors who in fiery editorials proclaimed their love of freedom. But they too, like the universities, were silenced, suffocated in the space of a few weeks. Only the Church fully opposed Hitler's campaign to suppress the truth. I had never had a particular interest in Church, but now I feel a great love and admiration for it, because only the Church had the courage and perseverance to defend intellectual freedom

and moral freedom. I must confess that what I previously despised, I now praise unconditionally."

Germany "there were 12,000 priests who in some way suffered threats, limitations of personal freedom, persecution". 49

They ended up in concentration camps and many activists were killed Catholics as well as representatives of other Christian confessions. Don Roberto Angeli writes thus about barrack 22 in the Dachau camp: «...in the midst of Catholic priests from every country, Protestant pastors, Orthodox priests, all priests in the pure state - without powers, nor trappings, nor privileges - eaten away by hunger and cold, tortured by lice and fear, without any dignity beyond the invisible one of the priesthood, we learned to discover the essence of life and faith."

According to data provided on May 4, 2000 during the conference «The martyrs of Eastern Europe and Nazism», held at the Regina Apostolorum pontifical university, «In Dachau the Hitlerites interned 2794 priests and religious of 37 nationalities. In Auschwitz they imprisoned 416 clergy. In total, during the Second World War, around 6,400 clergymen were victims of repression in Poland, including Father Maximilian Kolbe.» 50

Especially in Poland - which the Nazis wanted to annihilate as a nation - the physical destruction of the Church was pursued with greater ferocity: «At the hands of the Germans a large number of Polish ecclesiastics and religious died (to which many lay people must be added): 6 bishops, 1,923 diocesan priests, 63 clerics, 580 religious men and 289 nuns, according to some estimates." 51 Even in the other invaded countries, the Church was hit hard

49 ANDREA RICCARDI, op. cit., p. 73. 50

ANDREA COLOMBO, op. cit.

51 ANDREA RICCARDI, op. cit., p. 97.

persecuted (from France to Italy and Holland) and paid her heavy toll as martyrs. Often "martyrs of charity" like the Catholic Odoardo Focherini, thirty-seven years old, seven children, director of Catholic Action and administrator of Avvenire d'Italia. Having saved 105 Jews from deportation, he was captured by the Germans and deported to the Hersbruck concentration camp where he died on 27 December 1944. These were the last words written to his family: «My seven children... I would like to see them before I die. However, Lord, accept this sacrifice too and guard them, together with my wife, my parents, all my loved ones. I declare that I die in the purest Roman Catholic apostolic faith and in full submission to the will of God, offering my life as a holocaust for my diocese, for Catholic Action, for the Pope and for the return of peace to the world. Please tell my wife that I have always been faithful to her, 'I have always thought of her and always loved her intensely' 52.

52 See ANTONIO GASPARI, The Jews saved by Pius XII, Rome 2001, p. 15. In a survey conducted by Max Horkheimer and Thomas Mann among Jewish refugees in the United States, on who had helped them most during the Nazi persecution, it emerged that

it was the Catholics who provided the greatest assistance. The impetus for the salvation of the Jews was given to the entire Church by Pope Pius XII who went so far - a unique case in modern history - to secretly sponsor, in agreement with the English, an attempted coup in Germany to overthrow Hitler. Moreover, for Pius XII, defenseless in Rome during the German occupation, a Nazi deportation plan was already ready. Moreover, Hitler did not hide his intention to wipe out the Church, after the Jews. According to the calculations of the Jewish scholar and diplomat Pinchas E. Lapide, Rome

and the Jews (Mondadori, Milan 1967) «the Catholic Church, under the papacy of Pius XII was the instrument of salvation for at least 700,000, but perhaps also 860,000 Jews who were to die at Nazi hands" (p. 287). Pinchas Lapide, who was consul of Israel in Milan, after having reported in his book the words full of gratitude and emotion of the most representative personalities of the Jewish world and of Israel, observes: «There is no pope in history who has ever been thanked so warmly by the Jews, for the help and salvation offered to their brothers in moments of grave danger." Therefore, with his defenseless presence, risking his own life and with the martyrdom of many of his children, the Pope - which means the Church - did more than any organization or institution (starting from the States), despite having desired

We refer to Andrea Riccardi's and Robert Royal's volumes - for the sake of synthesis - for a number of other persecutions of the twentieth century: from the massacres for which Japanese troops were responsible in Asia during the Second World War 53 to the drama of the countries of Eastern Europe where we went from Nazi to Stalinist ferocity 54, from the case of Algeria and the entire African continent 55, to the tragedy of Lebanon, to the persecutions in Cuba.

Then there is a crowd of Christians, priests, nuns, bishops who were killed - in the context of civil, ethnic or social wars - for their fidelity to the gospel. From Guatemala 56 to the enormous slaughterhouse of Rwanda 57 (again on 30 April 1997 in the Buta seminary 44 Hutu and Tutsi seminarians were murdered because they did not want to separate from each other), up to Yugoslavia. And then from El Salvador

save far more from extermination than was humanly possible. In defense of Pius XII, after the false accusations hurled against him by a German playwright, I also point out another Jewish personality, Joseph Lichten, Pius XII and the Jews (Dehoniane, 1988) which reports documents of gratitude from the whole world Hebrew towards Pius XII. Despite the heroism demonstrated, Pius XII never claimed merit, he left others, who had done little or nothing, to magnify themselves and indeed he will begin his will with words that express all the pain and humiliation of not having been able to do more and better: «Be indulgent towards me, O God, according to your mercy!... I repeat now (these words) that the awareness of the deficiencies, the shortcomings, the mistakes committed during such a long pontificate and in such a grave time it made my insufficiency and unworthiness clearer to my mind. I humbly ask for forgiveness from all those I may have offended, hurt or scandalized." In conclusion, the Church should not really be ashamed of a great pope like Pius XII. On the Catholic side: PIERRE BLET, Pius XII and the Second World War (San Paolo, 1999), ANDREA TORNIELLI, Pius XII. The Pope of the Jews (Piemme, Casale Monferrato 2001), GIORGIO ANGELOZZI GARIBOLDI, The Vatican in the Second World War (Mursia, Milan 1992).

53 ANDREA RICCARDI, op. cit., pp. 208-213.

54 Idem, pp. 133 and 183. ROBERT ROYAL, op. cit., pp. 216-230

55 ANDREA RICARDI, pp. 314-315 and 349 ff. ROBERT ROYAL, op. cit., pp. 231-242 56

See «30 Giorni», 5/2000, pp. 22-37.

57 GIANNI MORIANI, The first century of hatred, Marsilio, 1999, pp. 140 ff

of Monsignor Romero (assassinated on March 24, 1980 by death squads) to Colombia (where he was

tortured and killed by the guerrillas on 2 October 1989, the seventy-five year old bishop Jesús Emilio Jaramillo Monsalve) to so many other cases that it is impossible to remember one by one.

The tip of the iceberg and Fatima

Riccardi's book, albeit with a few pages unsatisfactory, offers at least the possibility, like that of Royal, to historically situate the stories of the 12,692 Catholics of the twentieth century whose martyrdom was formally reported to the Holy See, with documentation and testimonies, by the Churches all over the world after the appeal launched by John Paul II in the preparatory document for the Jubilee of 2000, the Tertio Millennio Adveniente: «The Church of the first millennium was born from blood of the martyrs: "Sanguis martyrum - semen christianorum...". At the end of the second millennium, the Church it has once again become the Church of martyrs. The persecutions against believers - priests, religious and lay people - have made a great sowing of martyrs in various parts of the world... As far as possible, their testimonies must not be lost in the Church".

It is therefore on these documents that reached Rome that Riccardi attempted with his volume a first historical elaboration of this material. The basis for reflection is made up of the reports received by the New Martyrs Commission as of March 31, 2000, which are as follows.

Ecclesial condition

Laity 2,351
Diocesan clergy and seminarians 5,343
Religious 4,872
Bishops 126
Total 12 692

Provenance

Africa 746
Asia 1,076
Europe 8,670
Americas 333
Oceania 126
Former Soviet Union 1,111
Total 12,692

It is important to underline that this very high number of martyrs of the twentieth century represents only the tip of the iceberg, a very small sample of the 45 million and 400 thousand calculated by Barrett. First of all, why - being aimed at canonization processes - the reports concern only Catholics (therefore the entire tragedy of the Russian Orthodox Church is left out) and only those cases that it has been possible to document with certain testimonies and documents. Furthermore, because in many circumstances reasons of expediency or even temporal proximity of the events have advised local churches against sending reports. Finally because in the Church

canonizations have an exemplary value and there is no exhaustive concern about certain historical events that scholars dutifully have.

Thus, the most sensational episodes, such as the slaughterhouses in Sudan, Timor and the

Moluccas and Lebanon. Tragedies perhaps too recent for which very few new martyrs have been reported to the Commission.

Another example. For the Spanish case, an enormous number of martyrs was reported to the Holy See, 6,500 (which represents a large part of the European cases, 8,670), but always far lower than the overall number of those, especially lay people, who were killed in Spain just because they were Christians. So what matters is the meaning to be given to these events and the duty of memory to which John Paul II - in repeated interventions and in rites that he wanted to dedicate to the martyrs during the Jubilee, at the Colosseum and at Tor Vergata - he called the whole Church. No one is as aware as this Pope of what the 20th century represents in the entire Christian history: "A sort of apocalypse" he once said, and the Pope who brought the Church into the third millennium reads his own personal story (having suffered both Nazism and Communism) within this tragedy. Moreover, the pontiff himself came close to martyrdom with the attack on May 13, 1981 perpetrated by forces that remained obscure. It is impossible not to see the coincidence between the great martyrdom of the twentieth century which even affected the Pope, and the prophecy contained in the message of Fatima." 58

An idea from the twentieth century

According to the visionary Lucia, in the apparition of the 13th July 1917, therefore more than three months before the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Our Lady predicted that terrible

58 For details fr. ANDREA TORNELLI, Fatima. The secret revealed, Gribaudo, 2000.

punishments would befall the world "because of its crimes". Starting with a second world war "worse than this one". To prevent such a massacre and save all human beings «I will come and ask the consecration of Russia to My Immaculate Heart", "if they accept my requests" he would have said the Virgin «Russia will be converted and they will have peace; otherwise (Russia) will spread its errors throughout the world, promoting wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be destroyed. Finally My Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, which will convert, and a period of peace will be granted to the world."

There is also a third part of this message, remained secret until the revelation made by John Paul II during the Jubilee of 2000. It "consists of a prophetic vision" which illustrates what Our Lady had already predicted with the words quoted. Monsignor Bertone of the former Holy Office underlined that Lucia, in the conversations that prepared the revelation

of the third secret, «reaffirms the conviction that the vision of Fatima concerns above all the struggle of atheistic communism against the Church and Christians and describes the immense suffering of the victims of faith in 20th century." The same words used by Cardinal Sodano, in the solemn announcement of the revelation of the secret, on May 13, 2000, when the Secretary of State added: «It is an interminable Via Crucis led by the Popes of the twentieth century».

Even Cardinal Ratzinger, in the theological commentary on the third part of the secret, will write: «The path of the Church is thus described as a Via Crucis, as

a journey in a time of violence, destruction and persecution. The history of an entire century can be found depicted in this image", in the third secret "we can recognize the century that has just passed as a century of martyrs, as a century of persecutions and sufferings of the Church", but we also discover "that faith and prayers they are powers that can influence history and in the end prayer is stronger of bullets"". We also discover that "no suffering is in vain."

Cardinal Ratzinger finally analyzes the expression fundamental of the secret, the one attributed to the Madonna: "My Immaculate Heart will triumph". The pre is asked. side: «What does it mean? The Heart open to God, purified by the contemplation of God, is stronger than rifles and weapons of every kind. Mary's fiat, the word of her heart, changed the history of the world, because she introduced the Savior into this world..... Since then the word has been valid: "You will have tribulation in the world, but have faith: I have conquered the world" (GU 16,33). The message of Fatima invites us to rely on this promise."

This interpretation of the twentieth century, which captures the its temporal span a special intervention of the Virgin Mary, is therefore the interpretation of the Church itself and is also founded on the passage of the Gospel in which Mary reveals herself better, the Magnificat: «The Almighty has done great things for me /.. He has shown the power of His arm / He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their care / He has overthrown the mighty from their thrones / He has exalted the humble" (Lk 1, 46-55).

John Paul II saw Mary's direct intervention to save his life in the attack on May 13th

1981, precisely on the day of Our Lady of Fatima (anniversary of the first apparition). It resulted in 1984 that "consecration" of Russia and the world to her Immaculate Cure that she had asked for since 1917. Not even a year later Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Moscow and exactly on 25 December 1991, Christmas Day, the red flag was lowered over the Kremlin and the Soviet Union collapsed: with it, that communist experiment that had bloodied the continent for 70 years was swept away from Europe.

But incredibly, the collapse of an empire of that size and of a nomenklatura that had dominated

with totalitarian and ferocious systems (which even had the nuclear armament of the second world power at its disposal), it happened without a shot being fired, without even a glass being broken. That such an exceptional event happened on Christmas Day and that even the liquidation of the Empire was decided in a meeting of the leaders of the most important republics, which took place on 8 December, may say little to the lay observer, but suggests a reflection to those who look at human history with Christian eyes.

December 8th is in fact the feast of the Immaculate Conception and in the messages of Fatima - whose apparitions practically ended at the beginning of the October revolution - Our Lady asked for the consecration of Russia to its immaculate heart to obtain the

59 Their declaration of unilateral withdrawal from the Soviet Union effectively marked its end and the end of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (PUS). In a recent interview, Mikhail Gorbachev declared, regarding that meeting on 8 December: «Even today I cannot understand what was going through the minds of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian deputies» («Corriere della Sera», 30 December 2001).

conversion and announced - after many tribulations - the victory of his Immaculate Cure.

Obviously communism, as he also explained Pope in one of his speeches, collapsed for perfectly analyzable historical causes. But the action of grace, for Christians, unfolds through historical facts and within people's hearts. And certainly the instantaneous collapse of such an empire, which could have dragged the entire world into its ruin, is a very astonishing thing if it does not record even a single broken shop window.

Furthermore, Cardinal Sodano underlined another aspect of the global interpretation of the Church: «Even if the events referred to in the third part of the "secret" of Fatima now seem to belong to the past, the call of the Madonna to conversion and penance, pronounced at the beginning of the 20th century, still retains its relevance today" 60.

After all, unfortunately it is martyrdom and persecution against Christians who still retain their relevance today.

60 It is the same message as the current Medjugorje apparitions which appear to be the "continuation" of Fatima. See ANTONIO SOCCI, The Madonna and the secrets of the apparitions, «Il Giornale», 24 December 2001, p. 23. Also RICCARDO CANIATO - VINCENZO SANSONETTI, Maria, dawn of the third millennium, Ares, 2001.

Chapter Two

A BLOODY STORY

When the time has come, I would like to be able to have that moment of clarity that would allow me to ask for God's forgiveness and that of my brother men, forgiving with all my heart, at the same time, whoever had hit me..... And you too, friend of the last moment, who will not know what you will be doing, yes, for you too I would like to say this "THANK YOU", and this "AD-GOD", in whose face I contemplate you. And may we meet again, thieves filled with joy, in paradise, if it pleases God our Father, Father of us both. Amen.

- Dom Christian de Chergé

**prior of the monastery of Notre Dame de 'Atlas, Algeria,
killed with other monks on 27 March 1996,
by fundamentalist terrorists**

Almost 250 years have passed since Constantine renounced paganism and gave the Church the freedom to preach publicly. Christianity is spreading to the four corners of the earth, not without suffering new martyrs, but dissolving like the sun with darkness all the multiform paganism of the East and the West. In these years of the 6th century AD, an Egyptian merchant, Cosmas, who later became a monk, noted with enthusiasm that «among the Bactrians, the Huns, the Persians, the other Indians, the Persarmenians, the Medes and the Elamites and in the entire country of Persia, the churches are innumerable, with bishops, with numerous Christian communities and also with many martyrs and monks who sometimes live by

hermits. The same thing happens in Ethiopia, in Axöm, and throughout that region; among those people of happy Arabia who today are called Homerites, in all of Arabia, Palestine, Phoenicia, in all of Syria and in Antioch up to Mesopotamia, among the Clouds and the Garamants, in Egypt, in the Pentapolis of Libya, in Africa and Mauritania up to Gadeira (Cadiz, N..A.), in the regions of Southern Italy, wherever there are Christian churches, bishops, martyrs, monks, hermits, among whom the Gospel has been proclaimed of Christ. The same also happens in Cilicia, in Asia, in Cappadocia, in Pontus and in the northern regions where the Scythians, the Hyrcanians, the Herulians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks and the Illyrians, the Dalmatians, the Goths, the Spaniards, the Romans, Franks and other peoples as far as Gadeira on the ocean towards the north: there are believers and preachers of the Gospel of Christ, who profess the resurrection of the dead. And thus we see the prophecies computed throughout the world." 1

Christianity seems to have a power of overwhelming communication that encounters no obstacle capable of stopping it. But it was precisely in the middle of the 6th century that the figure of Muhammad emerged. The Jesuit Samir Khalil Samir 2 explains: «Islam was born from the beginning as a socio-political and also military project: this is evident both in the Koran and in the sunna, in the tradition that includes the life and sayings of Muhammad. For a Muslim, religion and politics are indissoluble." 3

1 Cit. in MAXIME RODINSON, Maometto, Einaudi, Turin 1995, p. 4. 2 Born in Cairo, professor of Oriental Theology at the University of Beirut and at the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Rome, he founded and directs the Center for Arab-Christian documentation and research. Essays by him have been published by Jaca Book and in the collective volume Christian Communities in Arab Islam. The challenge of the future, published by the Agnelli Foundation.

3 Interview with p. Samir Khalil Samir by Vittorio E. Vernole, appendix to La liber. religious ty in Islamic majority countries. 1998 report, published by "Aid to the Church in Need".

It was born as «a project aimed at unifying all the Arab tribes under the leadership of one person and to create an Arab empire in the Arabian Peninsula. It was the aspiration

of the tribe of Koreishtes to which Muhammad belonged. And Muhammad, in a brilliant way, managed to achieve it." 4 A political project carried out with religion and the sword (it is no coincidence that in ten years he waged forty wars).

Muhammad gives a religious horizon to his undertaking, for this reason «he recovers everything he can: the ancient Arab traditions, the tradition of Abraham, of Ishmael, elements of Judaism and Christianity. From Arab paganism come the rites of pilgrimage to Mecca that will be Islamized: he thus reveals himself as the only true leader of Arabia." Islam is therefore not just a religion, but "a socio-political, cultural and religious totality" and for this reason "it can easily slide towards totalitarianism". 5

Christianity, which was spreading throughout the world and starting from the Middle East, its cradle, was from the beginning the adversary to be delegitimized and subjugated.

Control Christianity

The Christian Arabs that Muhammad met were followers of Nestorius who was patriarch of Constantinople and died in 451. His theological reflection clashed with that of the patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril, on the "hypostatic union" in Jesus of human nature and divine nature. At the Council of Chalcedon (451) an attempt was made

4 Interview with p. Samir Khalil Samir by Aleksander Romanowski, in www.totustuus/Pagine_cattoliche_islam.htm.

5 Idem.

a conciliation, Nestorius' followers never accepted the conclusions of that Council and of the previous one of Ephesus. The Nestorians - while believing in dogma Trinitarian - essentially denied the total identity of Jesus Christ with the Word of God. This was the Christianity known by Muhammad.

Which only accentuated the denial of the divinity of Jesus: «For Muhammad it was the way to show that Christianity could not be universal». Indeed, "universal divine Christianity" explains Gianni Baget Bozzo «not only because it proclaims the equality of men in human nature but the vocation of all men to divine life. There is a strategy of Muhammad with respect to Christianity; to deny the divinity of Christ was to deny the universality of Christianity. This made Muhammad the first prophet addressed to all men."

In Baget Bozzo's judgment this means that «Muhammad's original strategy was an anti-Christian strategy. Muhammad could not be the prophet of the Arabs: he had to demonstrate, against Christianity, that Jesus was not a universal prophet, but only an internal figure in the history of Israel. Only in this way was it possible to make Islam the last, supreme and definitive revelation: and therefore universal." An operation which was equivalent to «reforming Judaism in a universal sense, removing every notion of Covenant of God's bond to the Jewish people. It was necessary to take away Jesus' divinity and Moses' alliance. The Koran results from these two modifications... Muhammad founded a religion

which had never existed before him." 6

6 GIANNI BAGET BOZZO, *In front of Islam*, Marietti, Genoa 2001, pp. 25-26 and 40.

A religion that had the universal claim of Christianity and immediately found its opponent in it. «Islam has waged holy war on Christianity» writes Baget Bozzo. «The lands that were the protagonists of Christianity in the first six centuries (Asia Minor, Africa) have become Islamic lands. The lands of Athanasius and Basil, of Cyprian and Augustine, the lands where the great synthesis of Christianity with Greece and Rome was accomplished, they became Islamic lands. And for centuries there was the possibility that the same would happen to Western Europe. Sicily and Spain were conquered by Christianity with difficulty." 7

The submission of the entire world to Allah (for this is what Islam means, "submission") is the specific goal of Islam. 8 Jihad - in the various degrees ranging from the fight against oneself to the war on the infidels to increase the Umma, up to the Islamic world state - is in fact the primary duty of the Muslim.

Just read the text considered sacred and untouchable by definition, the Koran 9: "War is imposed on you even if this may displease you" (sura II, verse 216); «Kill idolaters wherever you find them; capture them, besiege them, make them fall into ambushes" (IX,5); "Kill them wherever they meet!" (II, 191); «Fight them until there is no more rebellion and the religion is that of God» (II, 193); "Whether you die or they kill you,

7 Idem, p. 17.

8 Certain lands were not necessarily Islamized by the sword. But Vittorio Messori («Tesus», October 2001) explained how and why this meant a regime even worse than conversions imposed with the sword.

9 THE Quran, Mondadori, Milan 2000, 2 vols.

your return will certainly be towards God" (III, 158); "You did not slaughter them, it is the God who killed them" (VIII, 17); "Fight against those who do not believe in God and the Last Day, and who do not consider unlawful what God and His Messenger have declared unlawful. Fight among them to whom the Scripture was given (Jews and Christians, Ed.), those who do not practice the true religion. Fight them until they pay the tribute, one by one, and until they are humiliated"" (IX,29); «Do not hesitate, do not give in, do not invoke "Peace, peace!", while you are the strongest» (XLVII, 35).

The history of Islam has been the practical implementation of these precepts, despite the Koran also providing for exceptions, tactical alliances and provisional truces, as well as a certain amount of clemency. Moreover, other passages proclaim that there can be no compulsion in religion. But the historical interpretation that has been given has always been harsh for all non-Muslims.

It is often said - especially after the crisis international conference of 11 September 2001 - which Islam is not

a problem, that the problem is represented only by some violent fundamentalists. But Samuel Huntington replies: «Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate the contrary." «For almost a thousand years»» adds Bernard Lewis «from the first Moorish landing in Spain to the second Turkish siege of Vienna, Europe was under the constant threat of Islam». And Huntington concludes: «Islam is the only civilization to have seriously endangered, twice, the survival of the West»¹⁰

10 SAMUEL HUNTINGTON, op. cit., pp. 306-307.

Fury against the West

The twentieth century began with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the last remnant of Muslim power, and thus a leading state of the Islamic world was permanently lacking. ¹¹ Meanwhile, in the same 20th century, the most colossal and astonishing leap forward that history remembers took place in the West from an economic, scientific, technological and social point of view.

The Muslim world, which in the twentieth century was divided into dozens of states, it experienced the century as a lost challenge. For some time it focused on Westernization, but almost everywhere with socialist-nationalist regimes. Those ruling classes or the illiberal oligarchies of others Islamic states have not wanted or been able to build democratic institutions, with the guarantee of civil, political and religious rights and have not spread prosperity by helping the birth of productive classes. Despite the fact that Islamic countries found themselves in the hands of 40 percent of the planet's natural resources (with 20 percent of the world population) and therefore a historic opportunity having acquired - in addition to enormous capital - also very significant political weight.

This did not mean freedom, well-being and modernization for the people. The ruling castes have become drunk on privileges and abuses. While the discontent of the plebs was incited against the West and against Israel (the only democracy in a sea of despotisms), presented as the cause of misery and oppression. This is how they were born

11 It is no coincidence that the message from Suleiman Abu Gheith, spokesperson for Al Qaeda, a terrorist organisation, released on 10 October 2001, begins like this: «The Islamic nation has been here for more than eighty years, under the weight of joint Judeo-Cross aggression» .

fundamentalist currents have regained strength, also fueled by a significant demographic explosion which has increased social problems and produced a large migratory flow towards Europe. ¹²

Islamic fundamentalism essentially broke out after the Six Day War of 1967, with the explosion of the "Palestinian question" and above all with the progressive failure of the secular ruling classes. But, explains Massimo Introvigne, it has «among its antecedents the Wahhabi movement» which is «an eighteenth-century puritan attempt to return to original Islam» and which is closely associated with the Saudi monarchy because it represents at the same time «a formative element (by virtue of the pact stipulated in 1744 between

Wahab and the Saud family) and official ideology." 13

This is how we have seen the masses of young people for more than twenty years fanaticized by Islamist propaganda, financed by enormous oil revenues, who "are convinced of the superiority of their own culture" writes Huntington «and they are obsessed with the little power they have. The problem of Islam is not the CIA or the United States Department of Defense, but the West, a different civilization whose populations are convinced of the universal character of their culture"14.

Although the Islamic world largely despises it as inferior and corrupt Western civilizations (also sometimes catching the tallow regarding the widespread nihilism and loss of identity), he feels with frustration the force and seductive capacity of the West

12 The annual population growth rate in those countries between 1965 and 1990 was around 2.5 percent, when the world average was 1.85 percent.

13 MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, Osama bin Laden, Apocalypse in the West, Elledici, 2001, pp. 11-12.

14 SAMUEL HUNTINGTON, op. cit., p. 319.

for his extraordinary life opportunities. Furthermore, the 1990s saw yet another leap forward in the Western economy and the spread of Islamism following the definitive failure of those ruling classes 15 and strong economic-political pressure from the West.

Bernard Lewis - analyzing the "Muslim furor" - went so far as to state that «we are faced with a real clash of civilizations: the reaction, perhaps irrational but certainly with deep historical roots, of an ancient rival against our Jewish-Christian tradition, our secular present and the global expansion of both." 16

Once again, therefore, as in the origins, there is a clash between different universalisms.

Third invasion?

On 14 September 1998 Magdi Allam interviewed in London Sheikh Omar Bakri who, after recalling the Islamization of Constantinople, the capital of Christianity,

15 Martin Wolf in the Financial Times (16 October 2001) listed the facts of this defeat. Among other things, explaining that among the 155 countries in the World Audit index of economic freedoms, in 2001, we find the first Islamic countries in 42nd place (Kuwait) and 48th (Morocco). "Most of the others are in the group of countries with the least economic freedoms, i.e. above 100th place," writes Wolf. And in Freedom House's ranking of political freedoms, "only five of these countries (Bangladesh, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Turkey) were judged to be partially free." The others are dryly defined as "without freedom" and even - according to the World Audit - six of the eight most repressive regimes in the world are Islamic countries (Taliban Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Sudan). Moreover, adds the Financial Times, these countries are still losing ground: Egypt and South Korea had the same standard of living in 1950, today the Korean one is five times higher than the other. See also the excellent article by Guglielmo Piombini, Statism, the ruin of Islam, in «Enclave», n. 14. 16 Cit. in SAMUEL HUNTINGTON, op. cit., p. 311.

now Istanbul, he adds: «Now it will be Rome's turn, no Muslim doubts that Italy will be Islamized and that the flag of Islam will fly over Rome». 17

Unrealistic, sure. But how widespread is this feeling in Islam? Gad Lerner - who is certainly not anti-Islamic - recounted, in a book, the evening in which he made an episode of one of his television programs with "a thousand immigrant Muslims", with "many beautiful words about mutual understanding". After the end of the episode «a man came towards me hissing harshly: "It's all talk, the only truth is that 'Islam will conquer the world'". And instead I have to tell her that in the end it is he who tells the truth" 18.

On the other hand it is very worrying - today that the Muslims there are more than 10 million present in Europe and in countries like France they are a real electoral force - read the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights drawn up by the Islamic Council of Europe 19: there is reason to be concerned about the European future because it seems to be understood that the Muslims who may have become more numerous would also demand here, as everywhere, the transformation of the Shari'a State into law 20.

At the 1999 synod of bishops, Monsignor Giuseppe

17 «La Repubblica», 14 November 1998, p. 16.

*18 In LERNER-CARDINI, **Martyrs and murderers**, Rizzoli 2001, p. 165*

*19 In the appendix to ETIENNE BRUNO, **Radical Islamism**, Rizzoli, Milan 1988. pp. 308-317.*

*20 See a commentary on that document by EDMOND FARHAT, **Human rights and religious freedom in expanding Islam**, in «Il Nuovo Areopagus», 3/1999.*

Bernardini, archbishop of Smyrna, in Turkey, a Church founded by the evangelist John, made an impression with very alarmist words: «During a official meeting on Islamic-Christian dialogue, an authoritative Muslim figure, addressing the Christian participants, said at a certain point calmly and confidently: "Thanks to your democratic laws we will invade you; thanks to our religious laws we will dominate you". We have to believe it because the "domination" has already begun with petrodollars used not to create jobs in the poor countries of the North Africa or the Middle East, but to build mosques and cultural centers in Christian countries of Islamic immigration, including Rome, the center of Christianity. How can we not see in all this", concluded the prelate, "a clear program of expansion and reconquest?".

The problem of the compatibility of Islam with ours ancient liberal democratic countries has been discussed for entirely secular reasons by scholars such as Giovanni Sartori. 21 And he found an expression of enormous emotional impact in Oriana Fallaci's famous and very courageous invective after September 11th. 22 Just as tough with Islam the 2001 Nobel Prize winner for literature, the Anglo-Indian Vidiadhar Naipaul?. 23

*21 GIOVANNI SARTORI, **Pluralism, multiculturalism and strangers**, Rizzoli, Milan*

2000.

22 ORIANA FALLACI, *Anger and pride*, Rizzoli, Milan 2001.

23 «Religious war is the basis of Islam», «Corriere della Sera», 7 December 2001, p. 8. The precursor of this abandonment of secular political correctness is Claude Lévi-Strauss himself who was also the symbol of openness to other cultures: «I began to reflect at a time when our culture attacked other cultures, of which therefore I became a witness and defender. Now I have the impression that the movement has reversed and that our culture is on the defensive in the face of external threats and in particular in the face of the Islamic threat. Suddenly, I feel ethnologically and firmly a defender of my culture» (cited in "Mondoperaio", 1/2002, p. 60).

The Church, while underlining the Christian roots of Europe and the West and defending their heritage of civilization, freedom and respect for human dignity, I didn't want to be involved in a clash between civilisations, for many reasons. Because hers is a universal vocation, that is, Catholic, which seeks encounter and not conflict. Because most practicing Christians live in or come from regions other than Western Europe and the United States. Because the very origins of the Church are Jewish, that is, Middle Eastern, although Christianity above all shaped Western civilization. But above all because the Church by its very nature is the abode of mercy for all human beings. Even Cardinal Biffi, too often misunderstood, has said and repeated that the Church cannot fail in its duty of charity and welcoming her. Obviously, however, without turning a blind eye to those who would like to sweep it away. Therefore the Church invites us on the one hand to "not be naive" and to deepen one's own identity, but on the other hand also not to criminalize Islam as such and not to see an enemy in those poor people who fortunately come to us from countries of poverty in search of a finally human life and not for crime. The Church itself is often the only one to give them concrete solidarity and welcome, regardless of their religious beliefs. Defending their fundamental rights.

On the other hand, Christians know that contact with different peoples and cultures can represent a precious contagion of freedom even for those peoples who have only known illiberal regimes. But for this it is necessary that principles such as equality between men and women or the separation of religion and politics are accepted by those who come to live here, together with the renunciation of any

coercion and violence motivated by religion. "Making compromises on this" observes Fr. Samir SJ «is bad, because it also blocks the development of Islam. The West's loss of identity also hurts Muslims because it makes them insecure", 24.

Therefore it is decisive that multiculturalism is not it means how he renounces his own history and his own identity, according to a politically correct conformism that is ultimately suicidal. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger notes in an essay by him how, in the Western mass media. Christianity is mostly given a contemptuous and defamatory attitude, unlike other religions which it is politically correct to respect.

According to the prelate «there is self-hatred in the West

which is strange and can only be considered as something pathological; 'The West makes a commendable attempt to open up, full of understanding to external values, but it no longer loves itself.' Thus multiculturalism becomes only self-denial, but then "not only do we deny the identity of Europe, but we also fail to provide a service to others that they have the right to have". 25

This is confirmed by the most aware and profound personalities of Islam. Amir Taheri, who was the director of Tehran's most important newspaper, «Kayhan», before going abroad when Khomeini came to power, has repeatedly denounced the paternalistic indulgence of the West towards the Muslim world. He said he was shocked when he arrived in London. in seeing a series of BBC documentaries in which they tried to tear things apart

24 Interview with Fides. November 13, 2001.

25 TOSEPH RATZINGER. Europe, its spiritual foundations yesterday, today and tomorrow, in AA.VV. In Christ a new creature. Mursia. Milan 2001.

Christianity by all means, but even the slightest critical mention was avoided when dealing with Islam. "This is very bad for Islam" claims Taheri: "You treat us condescendingly like children and then complain if these spoiled children become irresponsible and violent." 26

Close schools for Ramadan as has been done in Italy and as, moreover, it is not done even in Islamic countries, while care is taken to remove crucifixes from the same schools out of a misunderstanding of respect for Muslim children (without any of the interested parties having asked for it)²⁷ and while there is care to celebrate Christmas in kindergartens without ever mentioning Jesus, in addition to being discriminatory and ridiculous, is culturally suicidal. «For someone» according to p. Samir SJ "there is also the desire to take revenge on Christian culture using Islam". 28 However, it is precisely a certain Catholic world that appears - in this work of self-demolition - the most zealous.

The surrender of the Christians

A deleterious interpretation of the is very widespread ecumenical dialogue in the Catholic world which is strongly influenced by politically correct conformism. The Comboni missionary Fr. Antonio Galli, for example, jokes about «certain Catholic Islamologists who to intensify

26 «Corriere della Sera», 17 November 2001, p. 39.

27 Many cases of forced removal of Christian images have even been reported (in hospitals in Central Italy). These were devotional objects of the sick placed on their beds.

28 Interview given to Fides, 13 November 2001.

dialogue suggest replacing the readings of Sunday Mass with passages from the Koran". 29

Furthermore, even Franco Cardini, a friend of Islam, warns against "certain priests of good will": allowing "Muslims to use places of worship

Catholics is ambiguous and risky: they consider it a sign of weakness and consider that a place that served Muslims has in a certain sense become something that is rightfully theirs." 30

Confirms the dangerous misunderstanding p. Samir who remembers when Cardinal Pappalardo gave the Tunisian Muslims residing in Palermo an 18th century church no longer in use, as a gesture of brotherhood. "For me it was the wrong thing." The confirmation came to him two days later when he read it the Tunisian press where the front pages wrote: «The victory of Islam over Christianity. The cardinal of Palermo forced to transform a church into a mosque." Of course, no one talked about it. Father Samir, as a profound expert on that world, explains that it is "naive" to believe that others think like us; sometimes "turning the other cheek in a Christian way can be perceived as an invitation to slap you, to destroy you." 31

Certain passive attitudes of Catholics also disconcert non-Christians. In a Jewish culture forum in autumn 2001, someone said he had seen, in a European city, a church occupied for weeks by sans papier (illegal) Muslims. They had done everything inside, even on a physiological level: «The rabbi said that he wouldn't have tolerated it in the synagogue. The mosque was not touched. The faithful for

29 «Avvenire», 6 November 2001, p. 30. 30

LERNER-CARDINI, op. cit., pp. 137-138. 31

Interview quoted on the «T otustus» website.

They haven't been able to go to church for weeks. Their protests were of no avail. The police did nothing, the parish priest demonstrated with the occupiers and the archbishop remained silent." Disconsolate conclusion: «It's a disaster across the board, it's an absolute collapse on the part of all of Europe. We are at the end of our civilization of which the Church was one of the pillars... Cowardice, stupidity, idiocy disguised as tolerance."

Beyond the specific episode, which is not possible rebuild, it is true that having respect for oneself is a duty, even of charity. Father Samir explains that for immigrants «living in Europe can also constitute the opportunity to discover not only democracy, culture, social justice, but also the figure of Christ. In my opinion, this aspect is almost always neglected by the Church... I even met a clergyman who for years refused to baptize a Muslim who wanted to become a Christian, "so as not to eradicate him", as he said. But Christ addressed men of every culture. By what right can one refuse the gift of the Spirit?" 32.

Sonia Severini on «Avvenire» 33 asked herself how can "deny the joy of having Jesus as a friend". Referring to the things told in the book of p. Jean-Marie Gaudel, They come from Islam called by Christ. It contains the testimonies of many converts from the faith of Muhammad to Christianity who had to suffer not only the incomprehension and persecution of their environment of origin, but also the coldness of certain Christians who told them: «Stay in your religion that will save you anyway!

32 Interview quoted on the «Totustuus» website. 33 6 November 2001, p. 30.

John Paul II has often exhorted Catholic organizations that work with immigrants not to limit themselves to responding only to certain needs, but to also think about the "offering of the gift of faith" 34, the greatest charity.

"For example, if Caritas which deals with Muslim emigrants only organizes food distributions, without revealing the source of this generosity and availability" observes Fr. Samir «something essential is missing.

Whoever comes to Caritas must be able to encounter the loving heart from which all this generosity is born, following the example of Mother Teresa's suras." 35

However, a manager of the Migrantes Foundation declares the opposite of Fr. Samir: «We have decided not to encourage conversions in any way, regardless of what Cardinal Biffi thinks». 36 In reality, Cardinal Biffi had limited himself to recalling the words of Jesus who sent the apostles to preach his gospel "to all" and did not add "except to the Muslims".

One of the arguments used by those who support this thesis is serious: it concerns the dangers faced by those who - even in Western countries - leave Islam for Christianity. In fact, as Sandro Magister explains, if «those who convert to Islam become celebrities, like the former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mario

Scialoja, those who convert to Catholicism, among the millions of Muslims who have emigrated to Europe, have a hard life." 37 Not

34 See «La Stampa», 19 October 2001, p. 11. 35 Fides, 13 November 2001.

36 Reported by Sandro Magister in «Converts from Islam. Whoever leaves Allah will regret it», L'Espresso online, section. Church, 5 April 2001.

37 Reported by Sandro Magister in «Converts from Islam. Whoever leaves Allah will regret it», L'Espresso online, section. Church, 5 April 2001

only he is banished from his family and homeland of origin, but in the West he often has to change city and even state to avoid "problems".

But should the Church renounce its mission for this reason or refuse baptism to those who want to become Christians? And Western states should accept that a tribal law is secretly in force within them? The Church rightly protects these conversions with great discretion, but it would be absurd if, with so many regimes already prohibiting conversion to Christianity, we added a self-prohibition even in free countries.

Precisely thinking about the lack of awareness of a certain Catholic world, Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, Archbishop of Bologna, in the Te Deum of thanksgiving at the end of the year, celebrated on 31 December 2001 in San Petronio, he spoke of the 33 Catholic missionaries martyred in 2001 in different parts of the world. That yes they add to the 601 of the last ten years and to the thousands of other lay Christians, also massacred in 2001, who lived mostly in Islamic or communist countries.

«Many of our brothers in faith have encountered one

violent death", said the prelate. «men of different races, but all poor and belonging to the so-called Third World, they were killed this year for no other crime than that of being Christians. It is a globalization of intolerance and hatred against which no protest arose in our country and no procession took place in our streets."

It was a reminder of that Catholic world that marches with the **no-global** and - in the name of third worldism and an equivocal ecumenism - often finds himself in "dialogue"

with despots and persecutors, instead of defending (or at least remembering) the Christians who are the most oppressed and humiliated in those countries. The cardinal also warned - having to deal with different cultures and religions - against the risk of forgetting one's own identity: «The Christian must not be afraid of anything or anyone except his own ignorance, his strange propensity to surrender, of his absurd willingness to sacrifice every manifestation and every trace of his identity to dialogue and hospitality".

This last sentence was tampered with by «Unità» of 3 January and reproduced thus, prominently displayed under the title, in large letters: «Christians must guard against that strange propensity to surrender, that absurd willingness to dialogue and hospitality".

Thus the meaning of the phrase has been seriously distorted. A few days later a priest from Bologna wrote to l'Unità protesting and the director Furio Colombo - instead to apologize - arrives, with an incomprehensible reasoning, to match the thoughts of Cardinal Biffi and of those who did not want to give up their Christian identity, to the infamous "racial laws".

In reality, the small and persecuted Jewish people are the greatest example of love and attachment to their own identity and those infamous laws wanted to wipe out their identity. It is objectively a disturbing claim made by those who want to force others (Jews or Catholics or Muslims or others) to renounce their identity.

Millions of Christians, in Islamic, communist and other countries, suffer daily pressure in this sense, often paying with martyrdom, and it is no coincidence that an authoritative Jewish intellectual like

Michael Horowitz denounced the indifference of the Western media and of our Catholic world in the face of this tragedy: «Today, minority Christian communities have become the favorite targets of Islamic radicalism and the remaining communist regimes, where Christians are demonized and caricaturized through populist campaigns of hatred and terror". And again: «The silence and indifference of the Western elites in the face of violent aggression, looting, to the torture, arrests, enslavements, killings and crucifixions of the increasingly vulnerable Christian communities makes my bones and my Jewish instincts tremble even more... (These Christians) are people whose current fate can easily become ours if we remain indifferent to theirs

fate."

Make it a point to ridicule them as «mediocre, uncultured and naive", the media have not realized that "Christians are a great force of modernity in countries where" a new illiberal, oppressive and anti-intellectual Dark Ages looms. Christians are the heroes of such a fight."

38

In Italy, another intellectual of Jewish origin, Paolo Mieli, after recalling "the unspeakable oppression to which Christians are subjected in many Muslim countries", suggested that Catholics place "an ethical constraint" on ecumenical prayer meetings such as that of Assisi of 24 January 2002: «n pact against those who kill in the name of God; or, as requested on other occasions with great vigor by the Pope himself, for religious reciprocity", that is, to ask for that respect for the most elementary

38 Introduction to PAUL MARSHALL - LELA GILBERT, op. cit., pp. XXI-XXIV.

human and religious rights that are denied or coerced in Islamic countries. 39

Cardinal Camillo Ruini, 10 December 2001, declared that this was precisely the path taken". 40 Moreover - as Mieli already said - there were continuous appeals from the pope - and from Cardinal Sodano, Vatican secretary of state - for "reciprocity", that is, in defense of the rights of Christians persecuted in Islamic countries". 41 Appeals completely ignored by those regimes.

However, it must be said that within the Catholic world yes they also hear other strange bells about "reciprocity". 42 Worth mentioning is a document from the "Committee Islam in Europe", created jointly in 1987, "to help the Church of Europe to reflect", by the Conference of Churches Europe (KEK) and the Council of Episcopal Conferences Europe (CCEE). The committee, made up of Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants and an Anglican (12 members plus some experts) drew up in 1995, at the request of the CCEE and the CEK, a text entitled **Islamic-Christian reciprocity**. 43 Obviously that text "does not represent the position of the Churches nor of the episcopal conferences", but it is still a

emblematic "working document" to understand the ideology dominant in the theological elite.

39 «Corriere della Sera», 3 December 2001, p. 33.

40 The prelate added that, comparing the ecumenical prayer of Assisi 1986 with those of 24 January 2002, we note the irruption today of «a novelty that emerges forcefully. This novelty is the great push to perceive and claim our Christian identity. It is an absolute novelty, also perceived by secular culture as a need not only of the Church but of Western civilization itself.

41 «The Pope: dialogue is right, but Christians must be respected», «La Stampa», 19 October 2001, p. 11.

42 «Vita Somasca», January-March 2001 43

Published by «Africa».

n. 4/1995. We quote it in the Centre's translation

Ambrosiano of Documentation for the religions of the Diocese of Milan, March 1995.

We read there that «too often in Europe Christians they oppose the supposedly good treatment of Muslims

who live in European countries... to the bad treatment of Christians in Muslim countries" and it is denounced that Christians have "prejudices against Muslims".

Further on it is stated that, with a few exceptions, "Muslim societies from the beginning have foreseen a religious plurality" and that the condition of Christians under the Islamists "has very often been better" than that with the roles reversed.

In fact, the West would have "shown a tendency to be totalitarian, to leave no recognition to religious minorities". And «on the other hand, Muslims have good reasons to affirm that, beyond some popular prejudices and the activity of extremists, Christians are respected and "protected" members in many Muslim countries."

Disconcerting words considering how much it drips tears and blood the news and history of Christians in Islamic countries. The aforementioned document seems to appear super partes even for that "small" detail represented by the possible killing in case of conversion to Christianity. Although a famous sura of the Koran (2, 256) proclaims that there can be no "religious compulsion", the document states: "according to the current interpretation the text means that no one must be forced to become Muslim, but it does not mean

that the compulsion to remain Muslim is excluded", since "the apostasy of Islam is in the Qur'anic context the equivalent of a betrayal towards the Muslim community".

No words of open condemnation follow for this

barbarity that has ferociously decimated so many innocent lives. Everything can be traced back - to these pages of experts Westerners - to a climate of cordial and graceful dialogue between specialists on the different customs which - at most - are "asked to be reconsidered"⁴⁴, without expressing the slightest feeling of suffering and denunciation of dramatic condition of the persecuted Churches".⁴⁵

Even a well-known theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, describes a truly curious reality. In fact, he formulates three principles: «1) Separation of Church and State or between religious and civil communities; 2) individual religious freedom; 3) dignity and human rights for women". Then he states that "modern Islam has agreed on these three conditions" (Who? Where? When? How?) And only "fundamentalist Islam is against it". According to him, "there are only a few states on earth where these three conditions of the modern world are not accepted and practiced." ⁴⁶

One remains incredulous when faced with such writings. As well as leafing through the proceedings of the sixth Christian-Muslim meeting on the theme «Religions and mass media. Islam and beyond", held in Modena well before 11 September 2001, in November 2000⁴⁷. In those pages it is denounced

44 A second document from the same committee, from June 2001, dedicated to what Muslims «expect from the Churches in European society» notes that «Muslims would like to be welcomed and treated properly» and that many Muslims «would like the Churches helped them to eliminate the prejudices against them". Finally they consider the «full decadence» of the Churches and «this is interpreted as

a demonstration of the superiority of the Islamic religion."

45 Furthermore, freedom of conscience is also denied to Muslims, given that even in "moderate" Arab countries it has happened that "enlightened Muslim theologians, who have attempted to explain the Koran linguistically or even according to the historical-critical method, have been persecuted, indeed even killed"", "Publik-Forum", 18/2001 (in "Concilium", n. 1, 5 October 2001).

46 In «Concilium», n. 3, 13 November 2001.

47 The media and Islam, Italian missionary publishing house, 2001.

an alleged hate campaign against Islam that was allegedly launched together by secularists and Catholics. The danger, as far as we can understand, would therefore be in the mentality of the West. Muslims are represented as "victims" and therefore indulged in an already highly developed victimhood.

The fate of Christians in Islamic lands seems not to be the case to interest. Only voices particularly sensitive to the plight of these human beings were raised 48. Father Samir explains: «Typical Western reasoning puts respect for other cultures first, but not when it comes to Eastern Christians»49. And this raises strong doubts about the solidarity and humanitarian sincerity of certain demonstrations to open the borders to Muslim immigration: why does no one lift a finger for the Christian refugees - much more neglected - who flee to the West due to religious persecution?

A significant testimony was collected in Belgium in 1994 by Didier Rance 50 who is the director for France of the "Aide à l'Eglise en Détresse". And the story of Fikri Akan, a Syriac Christian born near Midyat, Turkey, a land of bloody massacres of Christians in the twentieth century. His name alone bears the signs of persecution. In fact, the surname is imposed by the Turkish state which 50 years ago prohibited the Syriac ones and the name that his father gave him is Arabic, not specifically Christian to avoid the harassment that he had to suffer.

48 An exemplary and moving intervention was the editorial by Fiamma Nirenstein, «The war of religion returns», in «La Stampa» of 29 October 2001. 49 Interview with ACS, cit.

50 DIDIER RANCE, op. cit., pp. 288-291.

In his land, Christian holidays cannot be celebrated and most of the monasteries, points of radiation of the Syriac Christian language and culture, have been closed. «The kidnappings of Christian girls by Muslims who want to make them their women» says Akan «are frequent and unpunished by the Islamic power. In 1984 my cousin was taken away and her parents never heard from her again: all interventions with the state authorities were in vain."

Christians are exposed to every kind of abuse, since they are classified as such on their identity cards they cannot even camouflage themselves ("it's like the Jews at the time of Nazism") and this is particularly unbearable during military service. Akan managed to take refuge in Belgium «but not for economic reasons», he and

others fled there "to save their lives and freely live the Christian faith". However, contrary to expectations, "the countries where we have arrived are not Christian, Europe is not Christian, all or almost all of them are not interested in Christianity".

They have to live in ghettos and Western countries they are very careful not to hurt Turkey; they avoid recognizing the Syriacs as a people: «We would like to be considered religious refugees having left our land to save our lives... Finally we would like our language and our religion to be placed on the same level as Jewish or Islamic cultures». For example: "Why do states recognize so many rights to professors of the Islamic religion... while Syriac priests are not even recognized as priests and the Syriac religion is not taught anywhere officially?".

The flight of the Christians

The first phenomenon that expresses the dramatic nature of the condition of Christians under Islamic regimes is precisely the flight from their lands due to the substantial impossibility of living. And when dealing with more secular regimes, Christians are equally harassed and forced to leave - as already in Nasser's Egypt - because they are considered linked to the West, therefore suspected accomplices of the enemy

In those regions conquered by Islam are the oldest Christian communities in the world, which have flourished there since apostolic times, well before the arrival of Muhammad. But in recent years they are becoming extinct. 51 Christians feel forced to flee first and foremost by the objective difficulty of living in conditions of total abuse, humiliation and discrimination. Citres are tragic.

At the beginning of the century there were 32 percent Christians in Turkey percent of the population, while today they are just 0.6 percent. In Egypt, Coptic Christians were 20 percent in 1975, today just over 10 percent. In Syria, the figure dropped from 40 percent to 10 percent in the early 1990s and today it stands at 7.8 percent. In Iran we went from 15 percent to 2 percent in 1993 and to the current 0.5 percent. In Iraq from 35 to 5 and today to 3.2. The escape from Algeria was particularly dramatic for hundreds of men and women religious, targets of ferocious Islamic terrorism which - among its thousands of victims - caused particular outcry in the 1990s with the assassination of two bishops, seven Trappist monks of Atlas mountains and with the massacre of some nuns and priests.

51 See the data contained in AA. VV., Christian communities in Arab Islam. The challenge of the future (edited by Andrea Pacini), published by the Agnelli Foundation.

The most painful case of Christian flight from the point of historical view is obviously that of the Holy Land. Nazareth and Bethlehem, still inhabited at the beginning of the century mostly by Christians, today they have been occupied by a majority of Muslims. Even in Jerusalem the British authorities, with the 1947 census, counted 28 thousand Christian inhabitants, but when the Israelis did the calculations again after the Six Day War,

in 1967, they discovered that there were only 11,000 Christians left in the city during the Jordanian regime.

But the most sensational phenomenon is another: the only Christian country in the Middle East, Lebanon, was also substantially crushed, which - precisely because it was Christian - it was no coincidence that it was also a model of coexistence between different ethnic groups and religions, as well as one of the most prosperous among the countries in the region. In addition to the thousands of deaths and the many Christians forced to flee, 375 churches, 45 convents and 17 episcopal seats were destroyed.

A country with 3 million inhabitants that had to take on the presence of 350 thousand displaced Palestinians (to whom initially the Maronite Church, with its charitable institutions, gave possible welcome), then with the arrival of Arafat's militias precisely "harmless", it was inevitably destabilized to the point of actually losing its independence, in October 1990, when, thanks to the West, it became a colony of Syria.

The Lebanese civil war - I repeat: out of a total of 3 million inhabitants - caused around 150 thousand victims and 300 thousand wounded and 90 percent of them were civilians, not members of the opposing militias who were a very small minority (the Christians they had a huge number of victims, but it must be said that also the militias

"Christian" women have been guilty of serious crimes). While, since 1995, 300 thousand Muslims from various Arab countries have been naturalized, thousands of Lebanese Christians have been displaced or fled from their homeland 52, who fled, for example, to Israel after the troops of Jerusalem abandoned the south in May 2000 of Lebanon and the area ended up under the threatening control of Muslim fundamentalists.

Those of Christians are not unfounded fears: 2000 began with the assassination of Sister Antoinette Zeidan, director of a school, who was kidnapped, raped and strangled on the outskirts of Beirut. While a few weeks earlier there had been many attacks on churches in Tripoli and two Christian women, Salwa Yazbek and her daughter-in-law Sarah, had been beheaded and torn to pieces.

Lebanon is "controlled" by 35,000 Syrian soldiers and - although it is still a country with a Christian majority - it is undergoing progressive Islamisation, as declared by Bishop Joseph Melki who sees in this situation the cause of the flight of young Christians. Furthermore, in Syria they were detained until recently many Christians and are considered "desaparecidos", for example, two monks arrested in the convent of Beit Mery by the Syrians in October 1990. 53 It's even there

52 Since 1975 approximately 600 thousand Lebanese Christians have fled to other parts of the world. But perhaps the figure provided by Olga Mattera is exaggerated according to which «there are 7,000,000 Lebanese Christians in the diaspora», in «Limes», 1/2000, cit., p. 84. 53 Report 2001, ACS, p. 277. To understand the pro-Islamic politics of certain European countries it is enough to read what Fiamma Nirenstein wrote on 7 January 2002, in «La Stampa», in the context of an article on the return of anti-Semitism: «Hezbollah continues to promise the destruction of all the Jews. France presented as a great victory and a sign of sympathy for Lebanon (from which the Israeli army evacuated some time ago) the fact of having prevented Hezbollah from being

on the European list of terrorist organisations"

who recently suspects that they want to systematically target the young males of the main families Christians of Lebanon. In «Libero» of 24 January 2002 there is talk of «yet another death sentence. This time it was the turn of a certain Albert Fouad Haddad. With him there are 60 Lebanese of the Christian religion to whom in the last 18 months the military courts, which do not provide for appeal, have applied the maximum sanction with the accusation of having "plotted intrigues for the Israeli enemy and his agents", while approximately 3,000 Christians have been sentenced to prison terms exceeding 25 years, always on the charge of having sided with Israel rather than with the various Islamic factions." Not to mention the raid which, again according to «Libero», «at the beginning of December 2001

he brought 200 "enemies of Islam", i.e. friends of Israel, to prison." Beyond this news, which requires confirmation and further clarification (we need to understand if it really involves death sentences), the substantial suppression of the only Christian country in the Middle East is a sensational fact, under the eyes of the international community and yet deliberately ignored by everyone, so as not to offend Syria.

«A century ago», wrote William Dalrymple, «almost a quarter of the Middle Eastern population was made up of Christians. But today Christians are a small minority of 14 million people desperately trying to stay afloat among 180 million non-Christians. In the last twenty years at least 2 million people have left Middle East to build a new life in Europe, Australia and America." Particularly sad is the case of Istanbul which was once the capital of Christianity, now de-Christianised. Or the regions of eastern Türkiye where «the Syrian Orthodox Church is practically established

extinct. Its ancient monasteries are deserted or in the process of being abandoned. Christians who have managed to reach the West speak of extortion in exchange for protection, land expropriations and frequent murders."

Dalrymple spoke to Kamal Salibi, a Christian Lebanese historian of the Middle East, according to whom Christians are leaving because they can no longer stand it: "There is a bit of a feeling of the end of an era... But this battle is not over yet" 54.

54 «International», 9 November 2001.

Chapter Three

2002, ODYSSEY IN THE HORRING

"Muslims in the West do not enjoy security." Mostafa Boruajerdi (Iran's ambassador to the Vatican)

The violence that can be inflicted on Christians is of many types.

- And there's no shortage of imagination.

At the mercy

In Pakistan, for example, where there are 3,800,000 Christians out of a total population of 156,000,000 (96 percent Islamic), on Sunday 28 October 2001 some types (perhaps eager to undertake interreligious dialogue) entered the church of San Dominic in Bahawalpur and massacred 18 Christians by shooting. But there are "pastimes" that don't make the news, like the one reported by Camille Eid, which allegedly happened in May 2000, near Lahore. Some masked people block a van, separate the Muslim workers from the Christian ones and, at gunpoint, repeatedly rape the Christian ones. ¹ But there is also another

1 Cit. in CAMILLE EID, Martyrs of our time, «Traces», 12/2001, p. 26.

means, this time legal, to "have fun" with Christians. The blasphemy law punishes with death anyone accused of offending Muhammad: "by uttering words, or with gestures or mediated allusions, directly or indirectly". It is easy to make a Christian "slip". «It is enough to say that Muhammad is not the only Prophet or that Jesus is God to be condemned" says Philip Joseph Ghauri, the nephew of the Catholic bishop John Joseph who on May 6, 1998, after having desperately tried to defend his faithful accused under that very law, committed suicide to denounce the condition of Christians to the world. ² You can be hit and ruined for any foolish pretext if you are a Christian.

On May 11, 1999, the Christian brothers Rashid and Saleema Masih protested to an ice cream seller who did not want to give them ice cream in the same cups in which Muslims eat it. Eventually the seller accuses them of having criticized Islam and the Prophet and the two, whose families had to flee for fear of violence, were sentenced to 35 years in prison. ³ Prison where Ayub Masih languishes in terrible conditions, sentenced to death in April 1998 for the same "crime", tortured ferociously and repeatedly targeted for attempted murders. ⁴

According to Olga Mattera «people literally can do everything to the Christian minority, in the silence/consent of the authorities". ⁵

Saleema, of Christian faith, was just a teenager in 1997, when reading the Bible with a friend, Raheela, led her to conversion. The poor one

2 The nephew, however, does not believe in suicide. See the interview he gave to «Famiglia Cristiana», n. 48 of 6 December 1998.

3 ACS Report 2000 and 2001, pp. 252 and 290.

4 ACS Report 2001, p. 290.

5 «Limes», cit., p. 84.

Raheela was killed by Muslim fanatics, while Saleema was jailed on murder charges (for her friend's death) and tortured. In the end, however, she was exonerated. ⁶ Furthermore, in January 2002 the Christian electoral apartheid was even put to an end. As you can see, there is nothing to complain about, the situation is

"rosy", to the joy of all Western "ecumenicals". As in Iran, Iraq and Syria. The condition of Christians is so "lucky" that in these dictatorships, in which human rights are practically unknown (the first is a "heretical" Islam, the others are more secular regimes), compared to other Islamic regimes, Christians almost seem have rights. Obviously it's an optical illusion. In Iran «the life of a non-Muslim is worth significantly less. In the event of an accident, the financial penalty you risk is more than a hundred times lower" 7, almost all Christians have never fled to avoid accidents.

In Nigeria there are many Christians 8 and this happens more than It is common for them to be victims of accidents. For example, in 2000-2001, a few thousand were killed, and dozens of religious people were killed one size. Furthermore, shari'a has been introduced in 13 Nigerian states and hundreds of thousands of Christians have to flee to avoid "accidents". 9 Many, however, are ready to

6 ACS Report 2000, p. 253 7

Idem, p. 172.

8 There are 51,000,000 of them, 45.9 percent of the population. Muslims 43.9 percent.

9 On 30 January 2002, following the outcry caused in the West by the "Safiya case", the woman sentenced to death because she became pregnant out of wedlock, the Catholic bishops intervened with clear words: "Enough of this madness! Since the birth of the new democracy in Nigeria, in May 1999, it has been sharia that has threatened the harmony and stability of the country. Avoidable conflicts have already occurred between Christians and Muslims, which have caused serious loss and damage" (Misna Agency, 30 January 2002).

swear that fortunately it is moderate Islam. Always better to die at the hands of good people than fanatics.

Razor without anesthesia

Indonesia's is also moderate Islam. The balance? More than 500,000 refugees due to the violence. Indonesia - with its 212 million inhabitants - is the most populous Muslim country in the world. 75 percent of the population is Islamic, but there are also a good number of Christians, 13.1 percent, or 27 million 800 thousand people. The Constitution recognizes religious pluralism and a good percentage of Muslims are in favor of peaceful coexistence with Christians and other religions.

But both during the Suharto regime and after, with the successors, Christians suffered violence and massacres. The most sensational case concerns East Timor, inhabited mostly by Christians having been a Portuguese colony for three centuries. In 1975, at the time of independence, it was invaded by the Indonesian army, and annexed the following year, despite UN opposition. Since then the Indonesian occupation - according to Monsignor Carlos Belo, Nobel Peace Prize winner - has caused 200,000 victims and 250,000 refugees out of a total population of less than one million people. Finally on August 30, 1999 - due to American and international pressure - it was possible to hold a popular referendum

and there was a plebiscite in favor of independence, followed by new vengeful massacres of Christians.

In 1999 the massacres began Christians by fanatics in another Christian area of Indonesia: the Moluccas archipelago. On 19 January 1999 in Ambon, due to a banal disagreement between the (Christian) driver of a minibus and a Muslim, who began to say he had been attacked by a Christian, a series of cruel violence began and in three years they caused at least 13,500 victims and forced around 500,000 people to seek refuge elsewhere. ¹⁰ According to the diocese of Amboina, more than 6,000 Christians from the Moluccas were forced to convert to Islam (apparently with a combination of violence, destruction, forced circumcisions performed with razors and removal of the clitoris for women)¹¹, while others have lost their lives in refusal to convert like a group of Christians from the island of Keswi.

There are also particularly brutal episodes, such as the one involving the six Christian children killed in Ambon, in a catechism camp, who were «chased, disembowelled, emasculated and beheaded by Islamists who slashed the Bibles with their swords. In other cases the Islamist attacks take place with the help of regular military troops... as on the island of Haruku on 23 January 2000, when 18 Christians were killed" ¹².

Forced Islamization is disastrous for ordinary people. For example, with the departure of the Poverelle Sisters of Saint Joseph, the works built over more than half a century were destroyed: 12 schools, a hospital, a leper colony, two medical centers and a convent. The

10 Misna Agency, 19 January 2002.

11 Misna Agency, 29 January 2001.

12 This and other news are taken from the 2001 Report on religious freedom in the world of "Aid to the Church in Need", pp. 246-252.

violence by Islamic militias at Christmas 2000 reached the capital, with a series of attacks that hit the cathedral of Jakarta and ten other cities, causing 17 deaths and around 100 injuries.

There are those who speak of the involvement of men of the state, but it must also be said «that in many cases», «La Civiltà Cattolica» informs us «it was the Muslims who tried to protect the churches and who on that Christmas Eve lost a young Muslim man also lost his life as he attempted to throw a bomb outside a church and was torn to pieces." ¹³ This shows that there are Muslims in Indonesia who condemn violence and are brotherly with Christians. Instead, the same article in «La Civiltà Cattolica» risks fueling misunderstandings when it gives this singular explanation of anti-Christian violence: «In part the rights of minorities (where there is a dominant religion, Editor's note) are very limited, but sometimes they exercise also a completely disproportionate political influence, as has been happening for some time, for example, in the case of Christians in Indonesia, and

naturally this causes resentment from other religions." It is an explanation that involuntarily risks appearing

justification of intolerance (as well as being, in political terms, highly questionable).

Furthermore, the violence does not cease. November 9, 2001 the Fides agency reported new attacks by Islamic guerrillas in the month of October on the island of Sulawesi to Christian villages and busloads of Christians. with scenes of real manhunt, some deaths, and

13 This is recalled by Johannes Müller, director of the Institute of Sociology in the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jesuits in Munich and professor in Indonesia, in «La Civiltà Cattolica» of 19 January 2002. notebook 3638. I. 119-132, title of the essay : «War of civilizations between Christianity and Islam. Religious freedom between law and reality.»

many forced to flee. On the same island in Makassar some Christian students were brutally beaten. A church was burned in Java. In the Moluccas, more violence and deaths. A group of Indonesian Christians spread a message: «Let us pray for the Christians of Indonesia. We pray for their faith during the attacks and for those who suffer temptation to hide their identity as faithful to Christ. We pray for the world to take action against it persecution, wherever it occurs.»

The "Indonesia case" belongs to a special type of persecution. There are various others in the 26 countries shown in green on the map, where around 78 million Christians live and live as "hostages of Muslims". 14 We must add to them countries placed under another colour, but in fact with a similar condition, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, various African states and above all Indonesia as we have seen. That of Christians everywhere is a condition of submission, of deprivation of many rights, often of grave danger and in too many cases of predestined victims. Furthermore, the prohibition - punishable even by death - of conversion to Christianity is general. Every form of proselytism is also prohibited everywhere, although Islam claims this right for itself everywhere.

The expert speaks

To be honest, in the West there are also those who give a diametrically opposite version of the situation. According to Giovanna Zincone, who was president of the

14 Samir Khalil Samir yes. to «La Sicilia». November 2, 2001.

Commission for Italian emigration policies, it is Italy that does not recognize to Muslims those rights that Islamic countries instead recognize to Christians: «If we actually move abroad, perhaps to an Islamic country, we realize that, apart from few totalitarian theocracies, there Catholics have the right to build churches, to attend them and to have their own cemeteries. Religious freedom is particularly valid in the states from which the main Muslim immigrant communities in Italy come: Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt". 15

Therefore Italy would have to take an example tolerance from these States. Now, Zincone's thesis could be quickly dismissed by remembering that in Italy no one prevents Muslims from their religious practices

much less proselytism. Furthermore, it should be added that in the countries cited by Zincone, Christianity and its places of worship arrived many centuries before Islam (while the opposite is not the case for Italy). Finally there is no going on there, nor would it be never permitted, a massive immigration of Catholic populations arriving - even clandestinely - asking for places of worship, reception facilities, work, legal recognition, freedom of missionary proselytism.

Indeed - reading the 1998 Report on religious freedom of the "Aid to the Church in Need" - it seems that not even the pre-existing Catholic Tunisians were tolerated: «At the beginning of the 1950s, half of the inhabitants of Tunis were Catholic; with the declaration of independence, approximately 280,000 Tunisians belonging to this

15 GIOVANNA ZINCONI, *Italy, tolerance and new immigrants, in «Webgiornale», 12 November 2000.*

religion were expelled. Today there are less than a tenth of them, most of the churches are closed or do not function."

It should also be added - to the definitive denial of the Zincone's arguments - that in Tunisia «no licenses are granted for the construction of Christian churches» 16. Furthermore «no Christian missionary activity is permitted» and the penal code prohibits a Muslim woman from marrying a Christian man. Having said this, Tunisia certainly emerges as one of the most "tolerant", but not in comparison with Italy, but with other Muslim countries. In fact, it still allows the existence of the Church and some of its activities in the welfare and cultural fields. Although Islam is the state religion according to the Constitution and a Muslim must be the president of the republic, sharia has not been adopted as a legislative norm (a path undertaken instead, in recent decades, by a growing number of Islamic countries).

It should be remembered that - well before the Muslim conquest of 698 - this, together with nearby Algeria, was the land of Augustine and Cyprian, therefore one of the most Christian in the Mediterranean. Today it is among the Muslim countries that are least harsh towards Christians, but pointing it out as an example of tolerance to the West, which should imitate it, appears - to say the least - grotesque.

A similar reasoning applies to Morocco, where Islam is the state religion and the king is even defined as the "Guide of believers". The tradition of that monarchy is quite friendly towards Christians

16 2000 Report on Religious Freedom in the World, by 'Aid to the Church in Need', p. 348.

(which are just 1 percent), but the penal code harshly punishes any proselytizing activity and conversion from Islam to another religion. In 1994, for example, a young Moroccan man was sentenced to three years in prison because he had become Christian (and it should be remembered that the prisons in that country are hard to bear). «Mustafa Zemanda was arrested with others

18 people because he had received Christian literature by post"¹⁷, after which he was convicted because - unlike the others - he did not want to commit to refusing to receive similar mail in the future. In 1995 a similar sentence hit a musician from El Salvador who worked in Morocco, guilty of having given reasons to a Muslim to become Christian (they were also arrested five Moroccans guilty of having been influenced by him). The US State Department reported also the case of five Americans who were arrested and expelled in 1999 for having distributed Christian publications.

Religious rape

The other case cited by Zincone is Egypt which is often considered (with a considerable amount of imagination) a democratic country and which is an ally of the West. Furthermore, it is a country where there are many Christians, 15 percent of the population (around 10 million people out of 68 million) and these are very ancient Churches born even 2,000 years ago, well before the arrival of Islam. Egypt was the first cradle of Christian monasticism (with saints

17 1998 Report of 'Aid to the Church in Need'

like Anthony and Pachomius), the great theological school of Alexandria flourished here and a father and doctor of the Church of enormous importance such as Athanasius worked. Today Christians are fleeing at the rate of 10,000 a year. So as not to live as slaves.

In 1971 Islam was proclaimed the state religion and the *shari'at* is the main source of law (even though it has not been fully adopted as law). Religious freedom is recognized, but only in theory.

The most emblematic event dates back to 1981. After a series of violence and massacres, on 17 June 1981 a neighborhood of Cairo, Zawya el-Hamra, where Christians until then had been able to live normally alongside Muslims, was devastated by Islamic fanatics who they cause dozens of deaths: «Children thrown from windows before the horrified eyes of their parents, church fires and shops and homes looted: the groups of Islamist fanatics raged undisturbed for two days without the police daring to intervene"¹⁸

The patriarch of the Coptic Christians, Pope Chenouda III He denounced these massacres and Egyptian President Sadat had him arrested on 5 September and subjected him to forced confinement, where he would remain until 1985. Only a month later, Sadat himself would be killed by Islamic fundamentalists. Since then, the reaction of the Egyptian state against Islamic terrorism will be very harsh with regards to attacks on the state and the tourism industry, but very "distracted" when the violence and massacres are inflicted by terrorists on Christians. The State's response - beyond terrorism - will even be non-existent

18 Report 1998, "Car to the Church that suffers"

faced with the daily discrimination of Christians, their continuous humiliation, abuse and violence. So much so that Chris George of «Human Rights Watch» will be able to say: «The State has sent a clear message: that Copts can be discriminated against and treated as second class citizens». 19

To understand the climate in which Christians have had to live in recent decades, a few flashes that we take from Father Samir's stories are enough: one is woken up by the loudspeakers in the mosques demanding prayer, the radio (like TV) bombards exhortations and Islamic propaganda also on trams and taxis

(often with heavy accusations against Christians without them ever being able to defend themselves), one is forced to study the Koran in school (including Catholic ones), a Christian who wears the cross around his neck risks being beaten or having it torn away in the street, as well as a Christian priest risks, in state work Christians cannot access certain levels, as well as in the army and in politics, sometimes Christian girls are forced to wear chadors in schools, it is practically impossible to build new churches and it is very difficult to get permission to repair them, it is also forbidden to announce Christianity to others, before the courts Christians are not considered like Muslims and it is forbidden to marry a Christian for an Islamic woman while a Christian must in fact accept Islam to marry a Muslim. And finally, it is forbidden to convert to Christianity, while Coptic Christians, who represent a poor segment of the population, "are offered sums of money, jobs, even houses in exchange for the conversion of

19 PAUL MARSHALL, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

family"20 to Islam or otherwise, sometimes they are reduced to poverty, their assets are devastated, some members are attacked, their life is made impossible.

However, all this is still nothing. Terrorists wreak havoc the Christian villages, they kill, they plunder, they impose a "extortion", they kidnap young Christian women, they rape them to ruin their lives once they are returned to their families or they manage to extort from them the formal act of conversion to Islam so as not to return them to their parents and marry them off to a Muslim (obviously with the connivance, in most cases, of the authorities). Among the many cases we will remember the one from 1999 concerning the sixteen-year-old girl Suhir Shihata Gouda: «The family and other Christians in the village where she lives were beaten by police officers and threatened with death for trying to investigate the girl's fate ». 21

«The rape of Christian women» observes Olga Mattera «is used in almost the entire Islamic area by fundamentalist groups to force conversions to Islam and prevent the opposite». 22 The annual reports of "Aid to the Church in Need" on Egypt - even just considering those of recent years - are full of episodes

of violence against thousands of defenseless and harmless Christians: massacres, beatings, destruction, arrests, torture, harassment. It is physically impossible to report them. The most sadly known Christian village is that of

el-Kosheh where 25 people were killed and 33 injured in January 2000. The police force usually appears passive. Or worse, the English and American newspapers and the reports of

20 OLGA MATTERA, «Limes», cit., p. 81.

21 ACS Report 2000, p. 109.

22 OLGA MATTERA, cit., p. 81.

Amnesty International sometimes speak of torture and beatings allegedly carried out by the police themselves, even on children (in recent years, cases have also been reported limit of crucifixion of Christians on which it is difficult to shed light also because the judiciary does not appear to be an example of independence, efficiency and equanimity).

Furthermore, certain complaints reached the United States Congress, where 29 parliamentarians sent an appeal to President Mubarak asking him to put an end to this violence. The Christian population is so terrified and resigned to suffer anything that recently, when the American government or parliament proposed actions to impose better treatment of Christians in Egypt, they were the first to oppose for fear of the retaliations that would result from the "protection" of Western countries. This is also the reason

which induces the Vatican to avoid sensational public denunciations which would then be dramatically paid for by the Christian "hostages" of the Muslim majorities.

All this in a "moderate" Islamic country for the which American economic aid is vital.

On the other hand, how misleading and hypocritical the distinction between moderate and fundamentalist Islam is from the point of view of religious and civil rights has been clearly demonstrated by Ernesto Galli della Loggia who rightly joked - in an editorial in the «Corriere della Sera» - on the alleged moderatism «of paternalistic and/or semi-feudal absolute monarchies (for example Arabia, the Emirates, Jordan, Morocco)" as well as on the moderatism of the ""modern" military cliques united around a despot (Egypt, Tunisia)". 23

23 «In search of the moderates», in «Corriere della Sera», 4 October 2001.

Christians do not (r)exist

In fact, Saudi Arabia, the historical cradle and core of global Islam, although a regime - in theory - allied with the West, is by far the worst for Christians. It is, to tell the truth, for anyone who asks for respect for fundamental civil rights and for women.

«Saudi Arabia (which owns 25 percent of the planet's oil reserves), Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates» writes Carlo Panella «are not in fact governed by states

- neither modern nor pre-modern - but from pre-medieval tribal structures. The problem is not that there are no free elections, the problem is that (with the exception of Kuwait) there are not even fake elections, and this for the simple reason that fake parliaments don't even exist"24.

Really here, to "explain" the condition of

Christians it is not possible to put forward any ideological justification referring to the North-South clash of the world, to colonial or social reasons. But only and exclusively to the theological desire to sweep away every little trace of Christianity or Christians by imposing the absolute and total dominion of Islam. Officially, Christians are not even considered to exist. In fact, the authorities claim there are no believers of Jesus Christ in the land of Arabia although in reality there are at least 800,000 (3.7 percent of the entire population of 21,000,000 people). Most Christians are Filipino, Indian, Korean, Egyptian or Bangladeshi workers who

24 CARLO PANELLA, *Little atlas of Jihad*, Mondadori, Milan 2002

they suffer the most intolerable vexations in the indifference of the world.

The Constitution is the Koran itself. The law prohibits Christians any type of worship, catechesis or prayer not only public, but - in fact - also private, in their own homes. It is forbidden to celebrate Christian anniversaries and even to exchange Christmas greetings by telephone (while it is compulsory to respect Ramadan), even more so it is forbidden to even have a Gospel at home or to carry religious symbols, such as the crucifix (even at the Red Cross in rescue operations were ordered to erase the symbol and not display the flag).

There is not a single church in all of Arabia and none are allowed to be built.

Christians can't even set foot - sorry the arrest - in the sacred city of Mecca. It goes without saying that any act of proselytism is illegal and heavily punished and conversion to Christianity is fiercely condemned as a criminal act. On the other hand, one of the tasks of the Saudi state is to spread Islam throughout the world and guarantee da'awa, i.e. proselytism, which it does by financing mosques, Koranic schools and centers everywhere that often turn away fundamentalists.

There are hundreds of documented cases of Christians arrested for having clandestinely participated in prayers in private homes. This means that there are many more cases of undisclosed or undocumented arrests (also because immigrants from poorer countries are afraid or have no way to report it). Falling into these situations means suffering torture, trials without lawyers or guarantees and deportations, losing your job and being expelled. Or be forced to convert to Islam.

On January 7, 2000, for example, sixteen were arrested

Filipinos, including three women and five children between two and twelve years old, for being caught red-handed: they were reading the Gospel together in a private apartment in Riyadh. According to the ACS, "the death penalty for sexual violence is not applied to Muslims who rape Filipino women." 25

Filipino immigrants, Catholic and coming from a poor Third World country, are particularly harassed. One of them, Donnie Lama, for participating

at a clandestine mass in a private home, he was held in prison for eighteen months (from 5 October 1995 to 29 March 1997) and was only released because international organizations put pressure on him. But before expelling him to the Philippines they flogged him with 70 lashes. Others had a worse fate.

In this context it seems curious that the ambassador Italian in Saudi Arabia - converted to Islam - declare to «L'Espresso» that our government should «demonstrate that Italy is truly an open and multi-ethnic country»²⁶.

Maybe it's other countries that need to give similar demonstrations and an ambassador in Riyadh would not have to make much effort to guess which ones.

Amnesty International speaks of the Saudi regime as a regime of "terror and injustice", but power

25 1998 Report, ACS.

26 «L'Espresso», 6 December 2001, p. 222. The ambassador here advocates an advancement in the agreement between the Italian State and the Islamic community. Other singular statements are also attributed to the ambassador (through a third party), such as the following: «In Islam there is an absence of coercion; Muslims have never burned one of their Giordano Brunos." On the other hand, after a night spent in torment on a cross-shaped scaffold, they beheaded the Sufi master al-Husain ibn Mansur al-Hallag in 922. Just to mention just one case.

of petrodollars has so far guaranteed Saudi Arabia the intimidated silence of all democratic countries.

At Christmas 2001 - after the amnesty for Ramadan which benefited 12,000 prisoners in December - it was hoped that the 14 Christians who had been in prison for six months for having been caught at home praying would also be released, as promised (they came from Ethiopia, India, Philippines, Eritrea and Nigeria). Instead they were held in prisons in terrible conditions, without formal charges, without being able to meet representatives of their consulate and without being able to see their families. An inexplicable cruelty, even though the Pope himself, precisely for Ramadan in 2001, had made a sensational symbolic gesture of brotherhood with Islam, with the fast of 14 December. ²⁷ These Christians were finally released (and expelled) between January and February 2002, but only thanks to international pressure. Many others, about whom nothing is known, are at the mercy of violent people and despots.

27 This is the Pope's horizon. «Praying does not mean escaping from history and the problems it presents. On the contrary, it is choosing to face reality not alone, but with the strength that comes from above, the strength of truth and love whose ultimate source is in God. The religious man, faced with the pitfalls of evil, knows he can count on God: absolute will to do good; he knows he can pray to him for the courage to face difficulties, even the hardest, with personal responsibility, without giving in to fatalism or impulsive reactions", John Paul II, "Avvenire", 25 January 2002

Chapter Four

CAPTURED AND SOLD

«Some time ago, the Sudanese Supreme Court ruled that the

crucifixion of apostates, that is, people who are practicing Muslims and who have converted to Christianity, is constitutional. And this (Sudanese) is the state that replaced the US one in the United Nations Human Rights Commission."
Peter Hammond, director of Frontline Fellowship,
interviewed by WorldNetDaily, May 27, 2001

Sudan is the largest country on the African continent, yet for the world it does not exist. The longest war of the twentieth century is being fought there, but no one realizes it. Perhaps because it is a jihad, a "holy war" against Christians and those who do not accept forced Islamization. This is why it is invisible. The victims are both Christians and black Africans: doubly non-existent.

The country has 29 million and 500 thousand inhabitants: 70 percent one hundred are Muslims, 16.7 Christians (about 5 million), 12 percent animists. In reality, the Sudanese state, created by design, is made up of two different countries, from a historical-geographical, ethnic and religious point of view. The North is Arab and Muslim. The South is black, Christian and animist. The conflict began in the 1950s. In the seventies he had his only period of respite. Then in 1983 the Nimeiri regime claimed to impose the

shari'ato to the whole country. The Church and the Christian and animist South did not accept this imposition (independence military formations were born in the South). The subsequent regime accentuated Islamization in a frenzied manner, launching jihad against infidels and bombing villages, schools, churches and hospitals in the South (even hindering humanitarian aid to millions of starving people). Thus a massacre was perpetrated that was as enormous as it was silenced, amidst the indifference of the world.

Two million dead

On 10 December 1998, 50 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the «New York Times» wrote: «While all world leaders celebrate with great solemnity the declaration of human rights, no one, who knows why, remembers of Sudan. Yet in that country the Islamic front is carrying out a systematic genocide, especially in the southern part with a Christian majority. And a conflict that has already caused more victims than Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo combined: 1 million 900 thousand men, women and children. The vast majority are not rebels, but civilians, guilty only of not thinking like the regime's Islamists."

Indeed, the comparison with Kosovo is impressive. The United States and their allies intervened with a very heavy military hand against Serbia to protect the population of Kosovo: «For 79 days NATO, used for the first time as the "armed wing" of the UN, bombed Yugoslav territory using

approximately 200 thousand men and 1,127 aircraft, accomplishing 36 thousand air raids, exploding 21,000 missiles and bombs and

destroying 650 fixed targets, 200 power plants and factories, 60 bridges, 15 command centers, 9 airports and over 5,000 civilian buildings»¹.

All this because in one year of Serbian aggression in Kosovo 1,600 victims had been claimed. ² A figure, let's be clear, horrible, but infinitely less than the 2 million victims that have been caused by the Islamic war in Sudan, amid general indifference. For the Sudanese, no one intervened or raised their voice, except, sometimes, Americans and the Church. It is certainly commendable that the West felt the duty to protect the enclave Muslim woman from Kosovo and this shows how false are the Arab invectives accusing the United States and Europe of hating the Islamic world. But why did everyone remain indifferent to an incomparably greater massacre of Christians? Why are those populations black and their lives are worth less than those in Europe? Why are they Christians?

It must be for these two reasons, in fact the realpolitik of strategic interests was explicitly denied by American President Bill Clinton, who said that Kosovo was «the first war in memory

1 Social yearbook 2000, op. cit., p. 595.

2 See «The Catholic Tradition», 2/1999, p. 37. Furthermore, the proportionality of the intervention would have to be judged severely. In fact, it is worth remembering the death toll due to NATO's military intervention: «5,000 Yugoslav soldiers and 378 Yugoslav civilians according to NATO, 574 Yugoslav soldiers and 2,000 Yugoslav civilians according to the Belgrade authorities. Three deaths instead in the ranks of NATO" (Social Yearbook, cit., pp. 595-596). The Kosovars who were victims of ethnic cleansing during the war would have been 4,600, but according to an OECD report "the escalation of the violence of multi-ethnic hatred occurred immediately after the start of the NATO bombings". It must be said, however, that approximately 700,000 people, according to widespread reports, had left their homes to seek refuge elsewhere.

of man conducted in the name of values rather than strategic interests" (such a politically correct war could only have been waged by Clinton with the progressive European governments). Therefore, taking this candid statement at face value, we should conclude that the massacre of Christians in Sudan does not violate any values.

The figures of the genocide appear to be even more serious compared to the balance sheet made in '98 by the «New York Times». Amnesty International in its 2001 Annual Report states that «at the end of 2000, the civil war, which resumed in 1983, had cost the lives of almost 2 million people and had been the cause of the forced displacement of another 4.5 million people. Furthermore, it is believed that around 500 thousand people have sought asylum abroad."

Extermination by starvation was lucidly pursued, bombing the landing fields where aid arrived and then raiding and destroying crops and livestock, effectively causing devastating famines. Finally with the direct bombing of the villages of the South.

"Tens of thousands of people" writes Amnesty in 2001 report "were terrorized into leaving their homes in the oil-rich Upper Nile area following aerial bombings, mass executions and torture."

The first year of the century

2001 began for Sudan with the alarm launched by the United Nations World Food Program on 12 January, which spoke of 900 thousand people in the South in danger of their lives due to lack of food and water.

The Amref medical association adds another dramatic element: in the South there are only 10 doctors (4 doctors, 2 dentists, 3 ophthalmologists and 1 laboratory technician) for 3 million inhabitants. In April the UN humanitarian agency (WFP) diverted emergency aid to Sudan because as many as 3 million people were on the brink of survival. It's a drama.

The oil exports that began in 1999 bring about 400 million dollars a year into the regime's coffers, but this capital is not used to help the population from a food and medical point of view: it serves to finance the *jihad*, the "holy war" which massacres Christians and animists in the South and to terrorize those populations and force them to flee their lands.

On April 16, the Sudanese air force bombed the runway landing of Kauda, on the Nuba mountains, to prevent the arrival of humanitarian aid (food, medicines and seeds) to those exhausted populations. Father Renato Kizito Sesana denounces the silence of the UN and calls for humanitarian access to the Nuba mountains to be ensured to save thousands of people.

Also in April, the Catholic bishops of Sudan delivered a memorandum 3 to a delegation of American bishops asking for the support of the Christians of the United States for these objectives: 1) stop the aerial bombing of civilians by the regime and creation of a *no-fly zone* to protect the population (as was done in Iraq to protect the Kurds); 2) block the oil extraction from which the regime derives i funds to finance his jihad and the pretext for doing so

3 Life online, 11 April 2001

its "ethnic cleansing" across vast regions; 3) put an end to "the policy of famine", starting with the blockade that the Khartoum regime imposes on humanitarian flights: the weapon of hunger has been used to cause thousands of victims (especially women and children) and force just as many to flee ; 4) ensure religious freedom for all and put an end to the ferocious persecution of non-Muslims; 5) end the slavery to which thousands of people captured in the South are forced, especially women and young people, and help freed former slaves; 6) recognize the right to self-determination for South Sudan (as was done, albeit belatedly, for Timor

East).

Of course the opposite happened. Gianmarco Elia of the Amani association on 19 April denounced: «The war of the Sudanese government against the inhabitants of the Nuba mountains is a war in which all the rules are violated with impunity to exterminate the population

of the mountains... the most serious scandal is the refusal of the UN to exercise its right to humanitarian aid for civilians targeted by the government", among other things "thus leaving at the mercy of missionary bombings and NGOs who have decided to do not abandon the population. 4

In May, incredibly, Sudan was elected member of the United Nations Human Rights Commission (along with champions of freedom such as China, Cuba, Libya and Vietnam), while the United States was excluded for the first time in 50 years, that is, when the Washington government itself had wanted the establishment of that Commission. On the

4 Life online. April 19, 2001.

«New York Times» William Safire will attribute the operation to China and Cuba «with the connivance of the French, intent on ingratiating themselves with African and Arab dictators». 5

On June 28th in London Gerhart Baum denounces «the strong increase in human rights violations in the last year in Sudan". 6 On June 30, Father Kizito, with the Amani association, returns to denounce the massive offensive of the Khartoum army (on civilian targets and on humanitarian aid), which especially threatens the survival of the Nuba people (at least 100,000 defenseless people, already debilitated from hunger, I am in danger).

On 27 July the Catholic Church of South Africa attacks the cooperation agreements between that country's oil companies and the Sudanese regime. It is precisely in Durban, South Africa, that the UN conference on racism and slavery is being held at the end of August, where Islamic and communist countries intend to drag the United States and Israel into the dock.

In the same days of the conference, the aviation of Khartoum resumes heavy bombing of the villages of the Catholic diocese of Torit. The local Church denounces the crime, underlining that it was knowingly perpetrated on a Sunday morning at mass time: "It is a persecution, they want to deny the existence of Christianity in Southern Sudan" declares Father Maurice Loguti. 7

Meanwhile, while the government sends bombers on civilians. FAO and WFP launch a new humanitarian alarm.

5 Cf. ALESSANDRA NUCCI. Poor humans. And even the rights are poor, «Tempi, 17 May 2001.

6 Life online. 28 June 2001. 7

Life online. August 28, 2001.

There are still 3 million people at very high risk if international help does not arrive urgently.

After September 11, the Khartoum regime was quick to let it be known abroad that it condemned the acts of terrorism perpetrated in the United States, also for fear of being considered a target, having hosted for Osama bin Laden years (in the meantime, demonstrations of hostility against the United States and Israel were organized in the Sudanese capital). However those

a few words spoken abroad were enough for the UN Security Council which on 28 September, under the presidency of France, rushed to cancel the embargo against Sudan decreed five years earlier (only Bush's United States abstained and maintained unilateral sanctions on Sudan, renewing them on November 2 for "continued violations" of human rights). Among the great protectors of the Sudanese regime, there is also China, interested in oil.

A week after the end of the UN embargo - the 4 October - Sudanese vice-president Ali Osman Taha, knowing full well how important his country's Christians are abroad, once again proclaims to the Sudanese that "jihad is our path, we will not abandon it and we will keep its flag high".⁸ He spoke to the mujabidin leaving for the South where they go to massacre the "infidel dogs" and raid Christian and animist women and children, human goods to then be resold as slaves in the North.

In fact, after the UN lifted sanctions on Sudan, the bombing of villages in the South intensified, to the point of deliberately striking on 5, 6 and 7 October.

8 Misna Agency, 6 October 2001.

the villages where the United Nations Food Program was distributing aid, causing humanitarian operations to be interrupted.

All this just as the Italian pacifists were marching on Perugia-Assisi against the United States (guilty of wanting to hit Bin Laden). On 7 October 2001, for example, yet another bombing of a Sudanese village in the Mangok district went almost unnoticed, in which 15 children were killed and 8 were injured (a woman was also killed). Akür was seven years old, Atong eight, Athuai four, Maciek twelve years old... The list would be long. These populations are guilty of not accepting Islamization and forced Arabization. Therefore they must be wiped off the face of the earth.

Another inventory of the actions of war and extermination following September 11th was made on its website by **Center for Religious Freedom**⁹ and by Christian Solidarity International.¹⁰ These are the episodes of which there was news, presumably a part of those that occurred.

From 12 to 15 September, according to the CRF, around 260 bombs were dropped on some villages in the Fangak and Raga areas, killing dozens of people and a thousand heads of livestock (without which other human beings are starving). The same organization speaks of other bombings with victims (always civilians) on 9, 15 and 20 October. There is also news from twelve villages in the Aweil region of raids carried out between 23 and 26 October where 93 civilians were killed and captured - for

⁹ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>. ¹⁰ <http://www.csi-int.org/>.

to be sold into slavery in the North - 85 women and children. On November 5th a similar news story talks about

21 civilians killed and 113 enslaved in six villages east of Nyamlell town. On November 24th another similar piece of news and on the 27th another bombing.

There is also some good news. In October the worthy Swiss humanitarian organization Christian Solidarity International managed to free 4,041 black South Sudanese from the slavery in which they were held North. Never have the stories these poor people have told been horrifying. 75 percent of girls over the age of twelve were raped by multiple people, more than 90 percent suffered other physical abuse, more than 80 percent of them were forced to convert to Islam.

Human commodity

The CSI organization on its website reports many testimonies given by former slaves after their liberation. All equally atrocious. Here are extensive excerpts from some of them.

Mary Ajak Kuel Kout, fourteen years old, Sudanese girl from the village of Makuac. Testimony released in January 2000, after six years of slavery.

«I am Catholic, I was baptized in the church of Maven Abun. I was captured in Makuac in 1994. My parents managed to escape, I hid inside the tukul.

but I was found (she was eight years old. Editor's note). I don't know what happened to my brother and sister... When we reached the group, I saw all the adults tied with rope,

and the children walking around untied. I met my uncle's daughter in the group (who was standing under a tree) and the village boys. Anyone who stayed behind was beaten. No one dared speak, except in secret. I felt I had reached the end of my life. Some people died on the street, others due to beatings, still others exhausted from the wounds received during capture. Many women were raped along the way in front of their children. I was given to M. I was infibulated after being a slave for three years in M.'s house. Four strong men took me one morning when I was still sleeping. An old woman called Naima gave me an injection and then she cut me... I thought I was going to be raped. I was carried behind my tukul. I was called Fatima by M. After infibulation I was raped by the master many times. He had many other slaves. His wife did nothing, I had to do everything. The hardest thing was having to go far to fetch and carry water and then having to do it again. It took three hours of walking for each trip... I went to the Koranic school and learned Arabic. I was forced to be Muslim, but now I return to my Christian faith. I was born a Christian, I was baptized, all my relatives are Christians.

I believe in Jesus. I had learned Arabic at Maven Abun because Christian books were written in Arabic. I am truly happy because today you have freed me. I didn't expect something like this. God bless you and all those who sent you to us. I am saddened for the many people

which I left behind still in the hands of the Arabs. but I hope that God helps them too"

David Dut Ring Dut, fifteen years old, boy who has lost his sight. by Abin Dau. where he was captured and executed

slave on January 25, 1994. Testimony given after liberation, in June 2000.

***«Most of the raiders dressed "jellabayas" with turbans and all were armed with automatic rifles. They arrived around noon. They took the oxen, sheep, goats and many people. The men were killed. The boys spared. They divided the women and raped them
I was taken to Baraka. The master to whom I was assigned took me to his farm. I had to look after his sheep. One day, while I was herding the flock, an insect called OV, which causes blindness, stung me. I began to have symptoms of blindness and asked the master
to let me go back to my family who would take care of me. But he refused. Two years later, in 1996, I became totally blind. Now I am unable to do anything, except with the assistance of someone. My guide is my cousin who was enslaved with me during the same raid. I remained Christian. Father Rudolf Deng Maial beat me in 1992. My Christian name is David. I am truly happy to be back home, even though I lost my sight during slavery. I don't think I would have survived much longer if I had stayed there."***

Abuk Majak Yak, twenty-eight years old, from Yithon, mother of 7 children. Testimony from June 2000.

«I was enslaved four years ago. It was spring. I was in the fields when suddenly the soldiers arrived on horses. They approached in silence. They had khaki uniforms. My husband and children were all in the camp. We tried to run away, but my husband was shot. I saw him fall to the ground. Then they captured me and the children. I screamed desperately. The soldiers beat us savagely,

then they tied the children with a rope. They left my hands free to let me carry a heavy sack on my head. I don't know what was inside. The soldiers burned my house and those of my neighbors. We had to walk all day. At night the soldiers made a fence where we had to stay. After a while six soldiers came and took me to the forest where they raped me. At first I tried to resist, but one of them took the knife and cut me on all sides of my neck until I could no longer resist. The other soldiers looked on. Then they tied a cloth around my neck to stop the bleeding and all six of them raped me. Each of them, before abusing me, made me wash. It took five days to reach the North. Every night I was raped by different men. Some of us tried to escape. Everyone they recaptured had their throats cut in front of us. They did it to terrorize us. Among those who were killed like this there were also some of my neighbors. Those the soldiers couldn't catch they shot while

they ran away. They took us to Seteb. I was separated from all my children. S. took me to her house. She has a large farm and many slaves. I slept on the kitchen floor. I had to cultivate the field, look after the goats, cook and fetch water from the well.

The owner always complained and said I was lazy. I was forbidden to leave the house except to go to the well, where S.'s children always accompanied me to prevent me from running away. Many times I saw some of my children from afar when I went to the well. S. and his wife told me what I had to do. They always called me Adut instead of my real name. They did it to insult me. They wanted me to become Muslim. But I refused and never gave in. Sometimes the master came

in the kitchen at night and raped me. I got pregnant. The wife was offended and then she hit me with a stick. She gave birth to a son who was named Mohammed. Once S. tried to hit me while I was holding the baby, he hit him instead of me and killed him. Mohammed he was only seven months old when he died (...). Now I'm really happy to be back in my homeland, but I'm worried about my children. Three of them are still in Seteb with their owners, the others were killed by their owners when they tried to escape. Now I'll go look for my relatives. Please help me bring my surviving children home!"

It is estimated that there are more than 200,000 people currently held in slavery in northern Sudan. Terrible stories, traumas (and often mutilations) that will never heal. «The Arabs continue to make their loot of young Christians or animists, "infidels" and therefore inferior, to use as slaves» explains Father Mario Riva. «I will never forget a girl who came to confess because she had been a slave and, in her own words, she had been used in all ways. She bore upon herself the terrible sin committed by others." 11

Which side is the UN on?

The organization ***Christian Solidarity International***, The December 20, 2001, announced that in the last six months in Sudan it had managed to free over 14,550 slaves and brought them back to their southern villages. She was

11 In «World and mission», May 2000.

also possible thanks to the collaboration of the leaders of many ethnic groups and some Arabs, without paying any ransom.

«It should be remembered that in past years it had often been criticized by the UN for the practice of paying slaves' ransoms. According to Unicef, this system triggers a vicious circle in the supply-demand relationship" 12. But can we blame those who free so many unhappy people from slavery? Shouldn't it be the UN that receives harsh criticism? In reality, the regime has many more allies at the UN than associations such as CSI have. «In response to these anti-slavery activities the government

of Sudan obtained - on 26 April 1999 - the withdrawal of the concession to Christian Solidarity International of the status of consultative member at the UN, managing to have the measure voted on by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, with the support of Russia and Turkey and the abstention of Italy, Spain and France." 13 The absurdity of the situation was well captured by Peter Hammond, director of *Frontline Fellowship*¹⁴ (which supports evangelical communities in need of cars) in a very long interview given in May 2001 15. How is it possible to ignore the longest war of the twentieth century, in Africa's largest country, with that enormous number of victims? His response is disconsolate: «I believe

12 Misna Agency, 20 December 2001.

13 ACS Report 2000, p. 329. There are also other deserving organizations. For example, in the schools of the diocese of El Obeid, the African Catholic Congregation of the Apostles of Jesus assists 500 Dinka children freed from slavery. 14 The organisation's website (<http://www.frontline.org.za>) offers a lot of material on Sudan and beyond.

15 «Sudan's ignored atrocities», Geoff Metcalf interviews Peter Hammond on world's longest war, in WorldNetDaily, 27 May 2001, in worldnetdaily.com, learned in Italy by «Cristianità», n. 308, 2001.

that it's the classic ABC mentality, 'Anything But Christianity', anything but Christianity. It seems that when Christians are the victims, the secular media has no choice but to rediscover its own inveterate prejudice and simply doesn't tell the stories." .

Even in some Catholic magazines when they talk about the Sudanese tragedy they carefully avoid mentioning the *jihad* launched by the regime against defenseless populations and forced Islamization, but it is ruthless in accusing the West, which in fact has its faults of connivance or indifference, but it is not the persecutor there (moreover the accusations never target

Communist China which is the regime's main trading partner - for oil - and its arms supplier). The bishop of Rumbek, Monsignor Cesare Mazzolari is very clear: «It is not a military war but a war against the civilian population, subjected to genocide». 16 And Hammond is lapidary: «For the Sudanese government it is definitely a religious war».

There are those who say that it is a vulgar war for the oil and that Islam is being "exploited" for other purposes. but oil was discovered three years ago and the genocide has been going on for at least twenty years. Furthermore, the civilian populations of the South are exterminated because they oppose the Islamization and Arabization desired by Khartoum. Finally, if the objective is oil revenues, why does the regime use that huge capital to finance its own *jihad* thus demonstrating that oil is a means and Islamization is the goal? Oil has

16 Life online, 28 January 2002.

if anything it aggravated the situation, while it could have resolved - due to the profits it provides - the food drama of millions of Sudanese.

Hammond is very harsh with the United Nations:
«The UN gives most of its aid to the same Sudanese government that caused the famine» and «obviously the government uses UN food aid for forced Islamization. In fact, to receive some cars the population must first convert to Islam." The absurd thing is that a regime like this, the
whose Supreme Court - explains Hammond - "established that the crucifixion of apostates is constitutional... has replaced the US crucifixion in the United Nations Human Rights Commission".

Furthermore, this means that there is not only a rhad against the South with a Christian majority, where the Church is accused of supporting the rebels. but obviously also against the small Christian minority of the North.
The black year was 1992, when missionaries and witnesses were expelled from Khartoum. Didier Rance reports that he then received "terrible letters" from bishops and missionaries that leave one incredulous. It spoke of «crucifixion of catechists, massacres, closure or destruction of churches, kidnapping and sale of children as slaves. use of Christian civilians as human shields for the Sudanese army in its war against the rebels in the South. Thousands of refugees were headed towards Kordofan to be executed or enslaved there. 17

Today the Christian minority in the North, partly crowded into harvest camps, survives as best it can, with

17 DIDIER RANCE, OD. cit., DD. 302-303

the ever-looming nightmare that the regime could unleash new violence. The closure and expropriation of churches, schools and even Christian cemeteries is "normal"
As well as episodes of violence or arrest and torture. The terrible fate of those who convert from Islam to Christianity in Sudan is highlighted by three stories that were told in November 2001 by Sandro Magister. Stories of torture, disappearances and forced recantations. 18 And the daily hell of Christians in the Muslim world. Christians abandoned and forgotten by almost everyone.

18 SANDRO MAGISTER, Crescent against cross. If these are the victories, L'Espresso online, sec. Church, 9 November 2001.

Chapter Five

VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

WHICH IS NOT THERE

**«It is difficult for those who have never known persecution.
And who have never known a Christian,
believe these tales of Christian persecution. It
is difficult for those who live in a bank to doubt
the safety of their money.
It is difficult for those who live near a police station to
believe in the triumph of violence.
Do you think that Faith has already conquered the
world and that lions no longer need guardians?**

Do you need to be told that whatever was, can be again?

*Do you need to be told that even modest knowledge
that allows you to be proud in polite society will hardly
survive the Faith to which they owe their meaning?*

*(..) the Son of Man was not crucified once and for all, the
blood of the martyrs was not shed once and for all, the lives
of the Saints were not given once and for all: but the Son of
Man is always crucified*

and there will always be Martyrs and Saints.

*And if the blood of the Martyrs is to flow on the
steps we must first build the steps;
and if Time is to be overthrown
we must first build the Temple."*

- From Thomas S. Eliot, Choirs from "La Rocca", sixth choir

This chapter is dedicated to the ongoing persecutions in
the communist world. but communism is dead - it will be
objected - so why talk about it in the present?

"But communism is dead" is one of those **refrain**
behind which lies the human panorama of Bouvard and
Pécuchet and which therefore deserves the pen of Flaubert.
But there is also the (deeper) world of Ideology and of
veterans of a long connivance with Totalitarianism and
the Absurd. That simple phrase has become the
passport to the Third Millennium, for a certain political
and intellectual elite who, after
compromised in the history of communism and the geography of
conformism, it claimed to emerge immaculate and without
leaving any trace of a serious critical review.

But communism is dead, therefore - we conclude
why continue talking about it (implied: you have to be
monomaniac or have unspeakable goals to do so).
Thus the same censorship that loomed in those
decades cheerfully persists. 1

But communism is dead, therefore - it is added -
the adversary to fight against today - perhaps grouping
behind the anti-global "old boys" - is the
infamous "wild liberalism", the new true
totalitarianism (implied: we have learned nothing and
we start all over again with the story of Utopia and the
"promising" naivety of beautiful souls).

But communism is dead, and then - it is explained -
that was not true communism, it was a degeneration, while the
Ideal was good and remains innocent, 2 in fact whoever raised
that flag here in the West
red fought for Justice and Equality and had nothing
to do with totalitarian degeneration

*1 A small exemplary story of the climate that is still felt today, in GUSTAW
HERLING - PIERO SINATTI, Remembering, telling, ed. The anchor, 1999. 2 For the
demolition of this axiom cf. PIERLUIGI BATTISTA, The end of innocence, Marsilio,
2000.*

and bureaucratic of the East. It goes so far as to say that the PCI
had no longer been communist for decades, indeed, even «I
joined the PCI "against" communism» 3 (notoriously, Botteghe
Oscura was the den of anti-communists

visceral).

But it so happens that communism is not dead at all, given that more than a billion and a half human beings are still living under Marxist regimes who are not - until proven otherwise - history's rubbish. And given that millions of Christians still suffer, under the symbols of the "hammer and sickle", the torments and persecutions that have been inflicted on other millions of believers

in the twentieth century.

So there would still be time to take sides concretely against communist despotisms and take care of the victims. Perhaps speaking out against the tyrants of those regimes. But the last-minute anti-communists won't do it. Communist despots are always welcomed here with carpets and kisses (and commercial contracts).

I was saying that communism still exists. The information can also be useful to certain Catholics (even those of public importance and who have never been communists) who have often lamented, in this decade, the fall of the Berlin Wall as a disaster, a dangerous imbalance (perhaps produced by an obscure conspiracy) which delivered the world to a single empire, to wild liberalism and instability. Bullshit, of course, but bullshit repeated so stubbornly and without cross-examination that they have become argue truths.

3 Verbatim words by Piero Fassino, current secretary of the left Democrats (other DS leaders have made similar statements: see ANTONIO SOCCI, The PCI? It was an anti-communist party, «Il Giornale», 3 November 2001).

In a Catholic magazine that has long supported these theses titled an article on the subject with a silly phrase: "We were better off when we were worse off." Which however - to be honest - should be slightly modified and reformulated like the proverbial

Altan's joke: «We were better off when others were worse off».

So let's console ourselves: there are still those who are treated like dogs. And we can continue to remain indifferent to his faint cries, as we were to those of the persecuted of yesterday. Stories that once again cannot be described in detail. It would take volumes. And moreover, as Father Tran Oui Thien, who spent thirty years in a concentration camp, said when speaking of Vietnam, «no pen will ever be adequate to describe all the acts of terrorism, repression, suppression, assassination and imprisonment suffered by leaders religious people and their followers solely on a religious basis." 4

Good night Vietnam

Christianity arrived in Vietnam in the 17th century with the Jesuit missionaries and it took root immediately. Christians grew in number, but already in the 19th century, before the country became a French protectorate, between 100,000 and 300,000 people were massacred and persecuted for their faith in Christ (the Church later beatified 117 of these martyrs). 5 When the communist regime was established in the North, in the mid-20th century, the persecution

4 Cit. in OLGA MATTERA, cit., p. 85. 5
See ROBERT ROYAL, op. cit., p. 361.

flares up again and around 670,000 Catholics flee to the South.

These verses from the official poet of the regime make it clear what the climate is like: «Long live Ho Chi Minh / The beacon of the proletariat! / Long live Stalin, / The great eternal tree! / Under whose shadow peace finds refuge! / Kill, kill again, the hand does not stop for an instant / . . . / For the Party to last, let us march together with the same core. / We worship Chairman Mao, / We pay eternal worship to Stalin." 6

For despots of this kind (and this idiocy) he beat the hearts of a large part of the Western intelligentsia (and of the young generations) before and after the 1968. When Hanoi finally conquers South Vietnam, there are many Christians among the million and a half Vietnamese who flee, often on dangerous boats and sometimes dying at sea. However, there are still many Christians in Vietnam: around 6,500,000 (mostly Catholics), 8.3 percent of the population.

An emblematic story of the ordeal experienced by that Church is that of François-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. And on August 15, 1975, the Viet Cong had just entered Saigon. He has recently been bishop of that city. The communist militias put him on a pickup truck and with a tough night journey deported him to a prison in the north. He will remain locked in that hell for thirteen years, until 1988, and nine years will be of total isolation. Recounting that nightmare today, he recalls the enormous confusion at the beginning, the long moments in which he thought he was going mad. Until he understood that it was destructive for him to refuse

6 Cit. in AA. VV., Black Book of Communism, Mondadori, Milan 1998, p. 535.

that condition of his waiting for a change that would not come: "We need to grasp today by filling it with love." He understands that he must live his vocation there. Little by little that dark hell becomes a monastery and a church where Van Thuan prays for his faithful, for his jailers, for the Church and for the world, offering that condition of himself also through the mass. He consecrates by holding three drops of wine and one of water in the palm of his hand and keeps the pieces of bread in a cigarette box.

Little by little his fellow prisoners are won over by this man, they participate in mass and take turns in adoration with him. Van Thuan gets to ordain six priests in prison. And he doesn't forget those who are outside by sending them letters that he writes with makeshift means on old calendars that he manages to get out.

Also thanks to the collaboration of the jailers, ruthless at first, some of whom, little by little, convert. It was the thoughts of Jesus and the identification with him that supported him: «These thoughts», he says in a book about him, «helped me save myself, despite the harshness of prison threatening my nervous system.

I lived only one Word, the testament of Jesus: "that all may be one"... Living it in every minute to be holy is truly a great secret. I was thus able to live in the midst of almost unbearable difficulties, in the joy of the risen Christ, in forgiveness, in love and in unity. And this changed my captors who became my friends.

The prelate, today president of the Pontifical Council "Tustitia et Pax" he continued to carry, even after his arrival in Rome. a cross and a chain that he built thanks to the help of the jailers: «They helped me cut

a piece of wood from the prison and then secretly made this cross and also this chain with electric wire. I always carry them because they remind me of the love and unity that Jesus left us in his will." Also to adventurously get the things he had written out of prison, the solution came to him from a friendly jailer, "thanks to the love of Jesus among us".

Today the regime announces to the Church and the world its alleged desire for dialogue and openness. But in words. In practice there are still religious prisoners detained, arrests and searches continue in Catholic homes. with the seizure of Bibles and prayer books, and the prohibition of meeting in private homes. Camille Eid writes: «In May (2001) Father Nguven Van Ly was arrested in his parish and sentenced to 15 years for speaking about limited religious freedom. Government pressure has also increased against Christian tribal populations. The authorities presented a declaration to the inhabitants of Huoi Chom village in Lai Chau province in September (2001) to sign. "Before eating" reads the text "we will not make the sign of the cross, we will not invoke the Lord, we will not recite a prayer and when one of us dies we will not place a cross on his grave". "You can force my hand to sign a hundred of these papers," wrote Lv A Tua, a Hmong Christian leader, to Vietnamese Prime Minister, "but my advice will not validate a single one of them." 7

Furthermore, on 26 January 2002, Ricardo Cascioli in «Avvenire» 8, referring to a report by the Montagnard Foundation, gave news of the persecution unleashed

7 «Future». 23 December 2001. 8, Aurenires». January 26, 2002.

against the "Dega peoples" living on the central plateau of Vietnam, among whom, in the last two years, there have been massive conversions to Christianity. «Roundings, arrests, torture and disappearances began already in mid-December». In particular, in the province of Daklak, on 24 and 25 December 2001, some villages were invaded by 200 policemen and soldiers who began destroying Christmas decorations and then heavily threatening those who left their homes for prayers. Furthermore, they "forced Christians to publicly renounce their faith" and killed a pig, forcing them to drink its blood as in an animist ritual.

The fate of 300 Vietnamese who fled appears to be worse

across the Cambodian border where they were taken by the military and sold to the Vietnamese police: «According to the local inhabitants, these people - among them many women and children - were brought back to the Dak Mil district and savagely tortured before making them disappear who knows where."

Finally, the report from «Avvenire» targets i 17.9 million dollars that the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) paid to Vietnam in 2001 alone for "a rigid birth control program". The complaint speaks of "forced sterilizations" and the use of dangerous substances, all "aimed at the extinction of the Montagnards", from a demographic point of view; but it is presumable that any abuse and coercion - if they are ascertained - are to be blamed on the Vietnamese authorities rather than on the international body that finances the albeit questionable birth control plan. At least that's what we want to hope. In any case, it is still late at night in Vietnam.

Just as it is night - even darker - in Korea

North where a terrifying communist tyranny has dominated for 50 years over a population of slaves who are beyond to the direct crimes of the regime it is suffering a famine, caused by the madness of power, which claims hundreds of thousands of victims. 10 The night of this leaden regime, the most closed in the world, also swallowed up Christians (about 500,000, 2.1 percent of the population). For example, there is no longer any news of the priests present in Cora before the war. News is filtering out of capital executions of Christians (a humanitarian organization speaks of 400 believers executed

in 1999 alone, but no one can verify these rumors). Even in 2000 there were reports of executions of this kind 11, nevertheless it seems that faith in that hell was not totally turned off, or rather, the **Report 2000** of the "Aid to the Church in Need" even writes that "the authorities of the Northern Chora are alarmed by the spread of Christianity". Italy - in 2000, when it was governed by the centre-left - was the first of the G7 countries to establish full diplomatic ties with Korea

9 AA. VV., Black Book..., op. cit., pp. 513-530. There are an estimated 3,000,000 victims (out of 23,000,000 inhabitants) caused by Korean communism in 50 years, not counting those of the current famine. But the author of the essay wonders - beyond the deaths - how to calculate the destroyed life of a child locked up in a concentration camp because his grandfather was condemned (child forced to eat mice and earthworms for 10 years to survive); or that of a detained woman forced to have an abortion in ferocious ways or who saw her newly born child strangled or slaughtered by the guards. The most recent testimony is that of Kong CholHwan, in his book The Last Gulag, edited by Pierre Rigoulot (Mondadori 2000).

10 For this food crisis that has lasted for six years «World Vision recalls the possible figure of 2,000,000 victims and the German Pink Cross speaks of the death of 10,000 children every month», Black Book..., op. cit., p. 528.

11 See 2001 ACS Report, pp. 223-224.

of the North, but the problem of human rights does not usually seem to be at the top of governments' concerns

Westerners.

China is far away

Understandably surprised by the West's outcry over the repression of students in Tiananmen Square, in June 1989, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping pointed out that all in all it was "only" a thousand deaths. His astonishment was justified. Western public opinion had not batted an eyelid in the face of approximately 100 million victims (a lot cost the establishment of communism in China), indeed had it even become enthusiastic about the enormous bloodbath perpetrated by the fanatical "cultural revolution" and now an uproar was breaking out over a negligible thousand of idle young people being eliminated?

Furthermore, in the 1990s the world began to be very "distracted" again about the victims of Chinese repression. The growing economic power of China and its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) induce everyone, including certain unsuspected circles of international capitalism, to flatter the despots and forget the victims (this is confirmed - in addition to the acceptance of the Asian giant in the WTO - the awarding of the 2008 Olympics to China).

Very few therefore deserve any attention dissidents, the laogai (the Chinese Gulag) and the thousands of capital executions per year, complete with bestial cruelty. Christians, victims of religious repression, are considered even less.

Even the liberal elites of the West who do not have ideological blinders and who perhaps were enthusiastic about the student who faced the Chinese tank, appear snobbish and indifferent to the simple and humble Christian. As Michael Horowitz observed (and his words are even more precious as he is not a Christian), for these elites «political dissidents like the courageous young man who stood in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square are credible heroes, the possible martyrs who the more they hinder the path of dictatorial hegemony", while "it is hard for them to believe that there are, in today's world, people who endure the same certain fate as the hero of Tiananmen Square simply for living their Christian faith. They certainly do not know anyone who would do so, and the instinctive inclination of those with a secular culture is to believe that it is irrationality rather than admirable conviction that determines whether a Christian accepts martyrdom." 12

Even today, Chinese Christians, around 90 million, 7.1 percent hundred of the population (10-12 million are Catholic, the others are part of small Churches), live under the constant nightmare of repression, mass arrests, of torture, of killing. On 13 February 2002 the Vatican gave a list of 33 bishops and priests kidnapped, arrested and disappeared. And there are also 20 others whose names are not known. It seems that in August 1999 a "secret report" from the party called for the resumption of the heaviest repression. In fact, there are countless churches destroyed, faithful affected and seminaries closed. Also

in the Holy Week of 2001. On 10 July, in the Jiangxi region, around thirty priests were arrested

12 MICHAEL HOROWITZ, *op. cit.*, p. XXII.

and Father Liao Haiqing, seventy-one years old, had been arrested, 17 of whom had already been sent to prison. 13 With the arrests of Christians, their dense network of charity is also affected, which alleviates the suffering of the poor, the sick and orphans.

But - despite the persecutions - there is an authentic spring of conversions underway, perhaps due to the admirable testimony of those extraordinary figures of the great Catholic bishops. Like «Joseph Fan Xue-yan, bishop of Boding, reported dead to his family in a sack of plastic in May 1992 after being seized by the police and tortured. He had spent 22 years in prison, guilty of not wanting to separate from Rome and the Pope." 14

In 2000, another wonderful pastor died who millions of Christians in China look up to as a saint and martyr: Cardinal Ignatius Kung Pin-Mei, the archbishop of Shanghai who lived ninety-nine years, spending 30 of them in concentration camps, 2 under house arrest and 13 in exile. Chinese Christianity obviously thought of all these Christian martyrs of communism when, on 1 October 2000, the Pope canonized 120 people martyred in the Boxer uprising at the beginning of the century. Communism had nothing to do with it there. but the Maoist regime - despite having arrived many years after the Boxers - made their nationalism its own, also accusing the Catholics of being at the service of China's enemies. Therefore that historical fact allowed the regime to give historical bases to its attempt to separate the Chinese Church from Rome

13 See GEROLAMO FAZZINI, *Clandestine nativity scenes in China*, «Avvenire», 23 December 2001.

14 SANDRO MAGISTER, *That cardinal who makes China tremble from the sky*, L'Espresso online, sec. Church, 16 March 2000.

(Christians faithful to the universal Church are considered criminal traitors by Beijing).

The canonization made a great impression in China, causing thousands of conversions, with many of the "Patriotic Church" switching to loyalty to Rome, including the majority of those bishops so that the regime feels the situation is getting out of hand and reacts with violence. In fact, the regime's protests against those canonizations were furious: far from being martyrs, for Beijing they are "criminals".

The descendant of one of them, Father Francis Li, who on 29 October 2000 delivered the homily of the solemn mass in honor of those Boxers, explained that these accusations against the Boxer martyrs were historically unfounded. new saints: «If they order you to support the government of the Qing dynasty and you are killed because you don't do it, this is not to be considered a martyrdom» explained the priest «Boxers never ordered missionaries and Christians

to renounce their faith. They were killed because

they refused to do so. And this is true martyrdom."

The tenuous thread of dialogue that Rome has always tried to have with Beijing seemed to break precisely because of those canonizations. Then signals began to arrive in the Vatican according to which if the Pope had made a gesture of self-criticism - perhaps on the occasion of the October 2001 conference on Father Matteo Ricci - the regime would have reopened the dialogue. AND what the magazine «30 Giorni» openly claimed (September 2001): «This is confirmed by Michele Fu Tieshan, the official bishop of Beijing, not legitimized by the Vatican, considered by many to be the Chinese clergyman closest to the government's positions».

In fact this character is deeply disesteemed by Chinese Christians 15 and is a man of the regime. But was his "promise" reliable? The Pope - in order to leave no stone unturned - made a gesture of profound humility by sending a message to the participants at that conference at the Gregorian University, on 24 October 2001. In it he reiterated "our profound sympathy for the Chinese people" and apologized for any "mistakes" possibly committed by the Church in the work of evangelization at the time of the colonial powers.

It was an extremely generous gesture, in which the Pope exposed himself personally, but the Beijing regime responded with vulgar arrogance and took advantage of the Holy Father's humble words to flaunt them in its media as "proof" that the accusations always made Church were true. Naturally the regime's bishop Fu Tieshan joined the government (with all due respect to those who had credited his "promises").

There are those who accused the Pope of having made a reckless "mea culpa" in front of despots whose hands drip with Christian blood, but many "patriotic" Chinese Christians were deeply affected, and approached Rome, and for the persecuted Catholics - who know the regime well and understood the intentions of the Holy Father's heart - that message was a further, moving sign of love from the universal Church. This was explicitly made clear by the beautiful figure of Monsignor Mattia Pei Shangde, a man famous for his meekness and goodness, clandestine bishop of Beijing who, under house arrest, very ill and suffering, from the height of his eighty-three years and

15 Bernardo Cervellera writes this in «Avvenire», 29 December 2001.

of his decade in concentration camps (we will see this later), he declared: «When I heard the news (of the Pope's words) I had the strong desire to kneel before his person. I would very much like to thank him for the profound and paternal love that he gave us through the message of October 24th. The Holy Father brought us together (official and clandestine Catholics): only he has this strength. This courage and this ability to bring alive the spirit of Christianity, that is, love and truth. As he said in his message, we are not afraid of historical truth and of acknowledging our mistakes. Indeed, all of this will help us improve

our mission in the future." 16

Once again Christian logic, completely different from worldly logic, has shown immense strength in its very weakness, the triumph of compliance and humility over pride and violence. In any case, those who - after the regime's very harsh response - still cultivated illusions by claiming that they were just words and that instead the dialogue had been re-established, were refuted by the regime's actions.

In fact, at the outstretched hand of the Holy See, the government of Beijing responded not only with offensive words, but after a few days also unleashing a violent crackdown. 17 On November 4, Monsignor Lucas Li Jinfeng, bishop of Feng Xiang, was "taken" by the police who entered the cathedral and disappeared into thin air, together with his assistant. They were in the same diocese

16 Fides, 4 January 2002.

17 Furthermore, the Chinese regime had already canceled the visit to China, scheduled for October for the international conference on Matteo Ricci, of a delegation including Giulio Andreotti and Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, two of the personalities who did the most to urge the gesture of opening of the Vatican and the resumption of relations.

twelve priests were placed under house arrest, the seminary was emptied and three convents were closed.

2002 then opened with the death sentence for the forty-six-year-old Gong Shengliang and for his nephew Li Ying (the latter's execution was suspended for two years). Gong's fault is that of having founded the Christian movement Church of Southern China which gathers tens of thousands of adherents (about fifteen of whom were hit with sentences ranging from two years to life in prison). The news of the death sentence, which also reached the West, did not move anyone and no one dreamed of launching any of those beautiful press campaigns periodically set up for those sentenced to death in the United States. The case it's just the tip of the iceberg. There is no news of many others.

However, things went relatively well for the thirty-eight year old Hong Kong, Lai Kwong-keung, who on 28 January - for the illegal importation of Bibles into China - was sentenced "only" to two years in prison (thanks to the personal intervention of American President Bush).

For Catholics, the most moving news was the death, on Christmas Eve 2001, of Monsignor Mattia Pei Shangde, "clandestine" bishop of Beijing, the one who a few days earlier had sent out from his house arrest that declaration of gratitude to the Pope that we saw previously.

House arrest to which he had been forced for months despite his old age, eighty-three years old, and the serious kidney disease that made him need continuous dialysis. He died right in the hospital, where he was guarded: a poor old man, almost unable to move, very good and fraternal with everyone (starting with the members

of the Patriotic Church) evidently considered a formidable danger by a very powerful regime that dominates with an iron fist over the largest country in the

world.

He was born to a Catholic family in 1918. Five brothers, he was ordained a priest on May 30, 1948. When communism arrived in 1950, he was sent to work in a medicine factory. He survives the bloody storm of the cultural revolution by doing ten years of forced labor and in 1989 he was secretly consecrated bishop of Beijing. For his meekness, his simplicity and his great faith he was loved by everyone. So the regime had to order his funeral, on January 2, 2002, in his hometown, had a semi-private character because thousands of people had already decided to participate. They wanted to prevent it.

But - to everyone's surprise - they are at the funeral 5 thousand people managed to attend, while another 10 thousand were at the gates of the village, blocked by the police. The regime's repression and threats have not prevailed over faith and gratitude.

Conclusion

THE KING OF THE WORLD

«The wickedness of man who fails to respond to the call of the Infinite, the disasters that this crime causes, gather around this "wood", so that the death of the Man-God is the sum and symbol of all these disasters . Because the world is evil, the world is placed in the Evil One. And, at the same time, the irresistible power of God also comes into play, because precisely that supreme disaster, that evil, via become an instrument for redemption.»

- Don Luigi Giussani

I know that there will be those who, scrolling through the pages of this book, will object that Christians too, throughout history, have perpetrated crimes and persecuted. He won't make a great discovery: Christians remember this every day. The media and hundreds of books already tell us this daily, sometimes historically unfounded. Although some of these accusations are completely questionable and sometimes it is real slander against Christians 1, and although this is a book that for once wants to show the ongoing martyrdom of Christianity, it is a duty and pleasure to recognize that it is true: there have also been crimes and horrible intolerances by Christians.

I don't perceive this truth at all as a contestation of the martyrdom of many other Christians, why not

1 Cf. AA. Vv.. Church trials, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1994.

there is a contrast between the crimes suffered by the Church and those that Christians have perpetrated. The crimes are all together, all against Jesus Christ. And those perpetrated by Christians are the first that the Church declares and confesses.

Not only in the everyday liturgy. The Pope himself, the Vicar of Christ, on the solemnity of the great Jubilee of 2000 in which he could have placed at the center of the world's attention the immense martyrdom suffered by the Church in the century that was closing, he instead started from a humiliating,

public and painful series of "mea culpas".

It was an astonishing fact, but not new in the history of the Church. Many interpretations have been given, but the question to be answered is: why only the Church? Did the Church do something like this? Or rather, why can only the Church do something like this without collapsing under the weight of its sins? Because the Church does not need to "be right", to vindicate its immense historical merits, to show the greatness and holiness that have illuminated two thousand years, but since its beginning, since the Gospel, it shows the sins of Christians, the story of its first leader, Peter, the martyr

Peter, underlining his betrayal and his humiliating weeping until Jesus' affectionate forgiveness?

Don Luigi Giussani, in a splendid article commenting on the Pope's "mea culpas", explained that this can happen because "the Christian is attached to nothing except Jesus".² Compared to him, even the sanctity of the greatest Christians is nothing but a dirty cloth, as he already wrote, centuries earlier, speaking of the righteous men

2 LUIGI GIUSSANI, *That great strength of the Pope on his knees, «la Repubblica», 15 March 2000.*

before God, the prophet Isaiah. This explains the pope's gesture of humility: it is Christ that we must look to.

Is this possible for other religions? Let's make a historical comparison with Islam which we have discussed in this book. One of the episodes in Muhammad's life that many texts happily gloss over is the fate that befell the Jews of Medina. The Medina Jewish tribe of Ouraiza, the last remaining in the city, was coldly massacred: it took many hours to slaughter 800 males one by one and throw them into an enormous pit dug in the market of Medina. Their women and children were sold into slavery and their property divided up.

A great Italian Arabist, Francesco Gabrieli, he wrote: «This useless bloodbath remains as the most disturbing stain in the religious career of the Prophet. We do not share the casual explanations of those who hurry by ruling that "Muhammad's ethics are not ours". And also from that episode it follows that those who, then and then, shed human blood for the cause of Islam, did not act at all against the spirit of Muhammad; while those who spread it in the name of the Christian faith have always acted against the spirit of Jesus." ³

Max Horkheimer also captures this decisive aspect: «The Prophet's concept of God has never been contradicted by military expeditions, by forced conversions, by the extermination of enemies», while instead «to commit its crimes, Christianity had to resort to paradoxical interpretation, to the perversion of the doctrine to which it referred". ⁴

In short, he had to betray Christ and in the end he always has

3 Cit. in VITTORIO MESSORI, *Pensare la storia*, Paoline, Milan 1992, p. 625. 4 MAX HORKHEIMER, *Studies in the philosophy of society*, Einaudi, Turin 1981, p. 132.

had to recognize his mistakes, allowing himself to be judged and

purify by the splendor of the crucifix, the God of all innocent victims. Let us consider another sensational gesture desired by the Pope, the ecumenical prayer of Assisi on 24 January 2002.

Certain ecumenists who love the fatuous supermarket of religions were blocked in advance by the Pope himself who in the Angelus on Sunday 20 January warned: «The Day of Prayer for Peace does not intend in no way indulge in religious syncretism.»

In fact he wanted to be the opposite. It is no coincidence that the Pope in that Angelus he began by recalling «the tragic attack of 11 September last» and, indicating «the risk of new conflicts», he added that «in the face of widespread violence» there is a need to «disavow and isolate those who exploit the name of God for purposes or by methods that actually offend him.»

The one in Assisi was almost a typical event "enlightenment" that pointed the finger at the charge of violence that has always been inherent in religions (and in different civilizations) 5

5 Including Eastern religions that the West often mythologises, but does not know. Massimo Introvigne explained, for example, how different Tibetan Buddhism is from the watered-down version of it that circulated in Europe in the twentieth century (see «Avvenire», 8 May 1999, 30 October 1999 and 22 May 1998). Today we all rightly have to defend Tibet which is suffering a long genocide by the Chinese regime. It must be said, however, that previously there were problems within it regarding religious tolerance, as well as in other states before. Buddhist value, starting from Thailand (see ANDREA RICCARDI, op. cit., pp. 288-291; PAUL MARSHALL, op. cit., p. 257; ACS Report 2000, p. 41). Hinduism then, in addition to the terrible theology of castes and a violent fundamentalism (which in recent years, in India, following the very bloody clashes with Islam, is being unleashed against Christians: see SANDRO MAGISTER. India. Why Christians and Muslims are under attack, in Espresso on line, Chiesa section, 5 March 2002), also sees news leaked within it of «human sacrifices» that seem pro. come from the beginning of time (see India: mother sacrifices her child to Hindu deities,

in Repubblica online. 16 January 2002: and Hindu sacrifice: beheaded child, «La Repubblica», 4 January 2002).

as René Girard 6 demonstrated in his books: speaking of the "founding character of murder", he notes that "all cultures and all religions are built around this foundation which they conceal".

But «Christianity and prophetic Judaism are the only examples of religions founded not on the blind acceptance of the founding assassination, but on its lucid rejection». 7

Cardinal Ratzinger has repeatedly developed the idea that Christianity entered the world as the true "enlightenment" that dissolves the mists of superstition, the divine claim to power and the claimed sacredness of religious violence. In the conference held at the Sorbonne on 27 November 1999 he explained why Christianity meant "the victory of demythologisation". It is no coincidence that in ancient Rome he was accused of "atheism", because "he did not want to be one religion among others, but the victory of intelligence over the world of religions. 8

That is, the denial of the divine claim of every State, of every power 9, of every violence and of every executioner.

The agreement they entered into is therefore sensational invite religions to Assisi: remove all legitimization

theological to any form of terrorism or violence (and to the many religious persecutions of which many Christians are victims). Only the Pope could summon such a person

6 René Girard. French. he has been teaching in American universities for twenty years. His fundamental works, which have aroused great interest for the originality of his thought, are Violence and the sacred, Of things hidden since the foundation of the world, The scapegoat and I see Satan falling like lightning, all published in Italy by Adelphi.

7 RENÉ GIRARD, The rejected stone, Oigaion 2000, DD. 79 and 107.

8 The full text in «30 Days». 1/2000.

9 «The Christian martyrs themselves began the process of desacralization and de-divinization of political power, in order to also deliver other powers to their rightful autonomy», ALESSANDRO MAGGIOLINI, op. cit., p. 56.

encounter. And the Christian influence that pervades the world. And it is extraordinary that at least some representatives of a religion like Islam have joined an initiative in which the Pope called for "the effective recognition of human rights" as an "indispensable condition for authentic and lasting peace".

Naturally the Church moved towards Assisi with the his method which is not that of confrontation or challenge, but "of Christian love, respect and brotherhood with others" (Ruini). It seems strange to some that this is the same pope who published Dominus Iesus. Because that document disavows the "relativism" of those theologians for whom the revelation of Jesus Christ would have a "limited, incomplete and imperfect" character and "would be complementary to that present in other religions". Dominus Iesus also reminds us that, for Christians, Jesus Christ is the only and definitive Savior and is "the key, the center and the end of all human history". And he repeats that only the canonical books of the Old and New Testament should be considered "inspired texts".

(the faith of the Church is conceived in continuity with that of Israel) "firmly" reiterating the difference between "the theological faith and belief in other religions".

However, it is precisely this certainty - and not the relativism - the condition of true love for others' identities. In fact, the document repeats - in line with the Council and tradition - that «the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions» which «not infrequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men." It is therefore with esteem and sympathy that he seeks dialogue with them to bring out the greatness of every religious sensitivity and purify it from human violence.

Not because Christians have become immune to it. To the on the contrary, precisely because they believe they are the first bearers and the crucified Son of God, the definitive victim of human history, is the first to judge the violence of Christians. The Church that calls other religions to Assisi to delegitimize religious violence is not made up of Christians who impart lessons from above, but of men who are prostrate on the ground "like the prodigal son", humiliated like Peter after the betrayal, who for first confess their guilt at the feet of the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice raises and leaps over all the victims of the bloody

human history.

Naturally, that cross to which he is nailed continues to represent an authentic scandal even for modern common sense, which - Girard noted - asks: «How can we think that a young Ebro killed two thousand years ago with a type of torture that has long since been abolished can be the incarnation of the Almighty?». 10

It is clear that the recognition of Jesus as "true God and true man" arises from an experience of grace in a personal journey of freedom. But let's ask ourselves instead secularly: what consequences has this certainty of Christians regarding the divinity of that crucifix produced in history? Incalculable. as Friedrich Nietzsche intuited: «God on the cross: do we still not understand the frightening world of thoughts hidden in this symbol? Everything that suffers, everything that hangs on the cross, is divine... We are all hanging on the cross, therefore we are divine. 11

10 RENÉ GIRARD, *I see Satan falling like lightning*, Adelphi, Milan 2001, p. 164. 11 FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE. *The Antichrist. Curse of Christianity*. Adelphi. Milan 1977, p. 73.

It is a reversal of the pagan system of power over the world and Nietzsche denounces precisely this "disastrous" Christian subversion: "The individual was held by Christianity to be so important, placed in such an absolute way, that he could no longer be sacrificed, but the species subsists only thanks to human sacrifices... True philanthropy requires sacrifice for the good of the species - it is hard, it is full of self-overcoming, because it requires human sacrifice. And this pseudohumanism that yes

calls Christianity, it wants to ensure that no one is sacrificed..."¹²

Of course it took centuries for the strength defenseless of the crucifix affected not only the care of individuals but also their social and civil customs. And always, at every moment, from the dizzying heights of the cross and charity, there was the risk of falling back into barbarism and it often happened.

A beautifully dramatic and luminous story represented in the Choruses from "La Rocca" by Thomas S. Eliot:

«So it seemed as if men had to proceed from light to light, in the light of the Word, through Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their negative being;

Bestial as ever, carnal, selfish as ever, interested and obtuse as they always were before, Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their march on the path illuminated by the light; Often stopping, wasting time, going astray, lingering, returning, and yet never following another path."

12 Quoted in RENÉ GIRARD, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

Christianity has not given birth to men now immune from the bestial violence that is unfortunately the characteristic of the human species, but has placed a place in history

"factor" who continually judged them, calling their crimes "crimes", who corrected them, supported them, enlightened them, recreated them and taught them to love others. And this is what constituted the originality of the West.

Here's how a philosopher, Giuseppe Fornari, 13 represents our historical story: «Due to a series of historical circumstances, the West, which certainly did not shine for its meekness, found itself hit by the Christian message, by which it was, slowly but perceptibly, influenced. Amid violence of all kinds, in more or less Christianized societies, a sensitivity to persecution that derives from the evangelical message has developed. At first a few people, then a growing number, began to realize that in their society there were persecutions of all kinds, which were previously perceived as acts of justice or traced back to laws of nature or to the will of God. The fact that these accusations have become recognizable since the Middle Ages demonstrates the "slow work of demystification" carried out by the Christianity, which prevented men from creating new bloody myths, even if their wickedness led them to always behave in the same way. European civilization slowly freed itself from prejudices and superstitions, developing ideologies, such as the Enlightenment, which thought they were replacing Christianity, but which in reality were

13 Fornari follows the philosophical line of René Girard of whom he was a student. He wrote, among other things, Fra Dioniso e Cristo (Pitagora, 2000) as well as various essays (he is also the editor of the Italian edition of various volumes by Girard).

of further, and imperfect, historical derivations. Western culture has thus demonstrated a dynamism and ability to expand that no other civilization has possessed: the scientific, technological and industrial revolutions derive their origins from here, because nature itself has ceased to be mythically sacred, divine, and is become usable by man." 14 Girard in his latest work, asking himself what "the action of Christianity in our world" has been and is, concludes that it has made it possible for everyone to recognize situations of oppression and persecution and that "over the centuries this tendency it created a society that is not comparable to any other, and this trend has unified the world today." 15

There is therefore a moral globalization due to Christianity which has made its "concern for the victims" global, which was previously and everywhere totally unknown to human history: "It is a phenomenon unprecedented... no matter how much we examine the ancient testimonies and carry out investigations... it will not be found nothing that even remotely resembles modern concern for victims. Neither the China of the mandarins, nor the Japan of the samurai, nor the Indies, nor the pre-Columbian civilizations, nor Greece, nor the Rome of the republic or the Empire cared in the slightest about the victims who, with a generous hand, sacrificed to their gods, to the honor of the country, to the ambition of great or small conquerors". 16

Often, in the West, instead of recognizing this

*14 Interview with «Il Foglio» on 31 October
2001. 15 RENÉ GIRARD, op. cit., p. 218.
16 Idem, p. 212.*

extraordinary Christian revolution is attempted to be hidden, in various ways that Girard lists: 1) by turning this "sensitivity for the victims" against the Church and therefore accusing it of the worst crimes, thus transforming Christianity once again into a scapegoat 17; 2) arguing that this sensitivity derives from humanism or the Enlightenment "while the true origin is clearly Christian"; 3) using that feeling for "blame" only the West in the face of other civilizations considered innocent by definition; 4) finally reducing this sensitivity for the victims to a sentimental and banal politically correct "manner", without remaining indifferent to the martyrdom of Christians.

«But now», states Girard, «to truly escape Christianity, our world would have to completely renounce sensitivity to the victims, and this is precisely what Nietzsche and Nazism had understood»¹⁸

This simplification - which brings out the two poles of the alternative: either total bestiality, or the Judeo-Christian sensitivity, which has already made archaic religions disappear - is also laying siege to the ancient civilizations linked to the great religions: Buddhism, 19 Hinduism 20

17 «What is not forgiven for the Church is not so much that it has committed human violence, but rather that it is the bearer of a message that demonstrates the violence of the men who compose it, and therefore the violence of all», GIUSEPPE FORNARI, Fra Dioniso e Christ, op. cit., p. 397.

18 RENÉ GIRARD, op. cit., p. 234.

19 The influence of Christianity on the current Dalai Lama and on the modernist reform of Buddhism that he is carrying out is evident and, among other things, also recognized by himself in some references (see interview with Renata Pisu on «La Repubblica»).

20 The prohibition of "sacred violence", the abolition of the caste system codified in the Constitution and democracy (despite a thousand contradictions), events deriving from India's impact with English-Christian culture, represent a

and Islam. 21 Obviously only a spiritual siege, completely non-violent, which has the face of the humility of the Holy Father who asks for forgiveness, of the charity of Mother Teresa, of the many Christian martyrs who suffer persecution with love, this "siege" - I was saying - it is also cultural and political and passes (in spite of itself and despite a thousand contradictions and errors) also through Western civilization: its "sensitivity for the victims" is a globalization of the value of the person which now embraces the entire planet and which is the human reverberation of Christianity. 22

In this sense we understand why Girard - from a purely secular, anthropological point of view - recognizes historical truth in the qualification of "king" that the Church attributed to the Crucifix, recognizing his own throne in that scaffold.

On April 7 of the year 30, at 3 pm, outside the walls of Jerusalem, a realistic analysis would have noted a total debacle, a man totally defeated and annihilated

radical break with the thousand-year-old Hindu tradition and this is precisely what provokes the start. very slow Hindu fundamentalism that still bloodied that great country. It is a historic transition of civilization that is underway and it is no coincidence that particular intolerance is unleashed against the conversion to Christianity of Dalits (the untouchables), whose mass transition to Christianity envisaged by some of their leaders (there are 300 million) would mean a turning point in world history. This is why Hindu violence so harshly targets Christians engaged in charitable works and even public authorities try to hinder these conversions.

21 What the Islamic world feels as "dangerous" in the West, and which it fights hard, are not at all - as we often believe - the decadent aspects of our world (hedonism, venality, amorality), which it is not difficult to find in ruling classes of those regimes: instead, they are respect for men's and women's rights, freedom of conscience, democracy, all those pillars, that is, which have translated the Christian heritage secularly. The fact that the "defense from the "aggression" of these values is so violent proves the irresistible fascination that they exercise and will increasingly exercise on the women and men of those countries.

22 «The presence and activity of the Spirit does not only affect individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures, religions», Redemptoris Missio, n. 28.

his mission. And she would have judged the words he had uttered a few hours earlier to be ridiculous and unrealistic: "or I have conquered the world". 23 One of the many overwhelmed people in history who are forgotten in a matter of days. No one could have thought that two thousand years later the world would be filled with his name and his pity for the victims.

He had become a man and had accepted that torture for to make human beings, unhappy and lost in the satanic mechanism of violence, aware of the Father's immense, poignant and unquenchable love for each of them. Love that he revealed precisely by letting the most cruel ferocity of men vent "absolutely" against himself, innocent mocked, persecuted, tortured and nailed, allowing himself to be slaughtered like the sacrificial lamb.

First a few, then billions of men were touched by the overwhelming strength of such a great love. Thus began his Kingdom in the world, a non-political kingdom, but a very concrete one: in human hearts. And his throne is truly the Cross. For this reason on the lips of many martyrs of the twentieth century mentioned in these pages, the last words - after the pardon for the executioners - were: «Long live Christ the King!».

23 He says this by preparing his followers for persecution: "You will have tribulation in the world, but have faith: I have overcome the world" (Gu 16, 33).

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Global map on «Religious freedom in the world»
taken from the «2001 Report» of Aid to the Church
in Need (Piazza San Calisto 16. 00153 Rome)

In green

Islamic area. Countries where discrimination based on Islamic law prevails, which translates into the prohibition for Muslims to convert to a cult other than Islam and in the following, mission of other citizens to the dictates of the Muslim system.

In red

Social-communist area. States in which a social-communist party in power prevents, even with violence, the free exercise of religion by citizens, violently persecuting the representatives of religious associations not controlled by the government.

In yellow

Hindu-Buddhist area. Hindu and/or Buddhist predominance, with social, political and legal discrimination against those belonging to other confessions.

In black

Conflict area. Territories where, during 2000, killings of missionaries and local religious people, massacres of civilians and bloody clashes between communities of different faiths were recorded.

In grey

Area with restrictive legislation or social pressures. Legislation detrimental to the right to religious freedom of minorities and administrative persecution of unrecognized associations.

In light blue

Countries not included in the other areas and in which, during the year 2000, there were no reports of significant episodes.

250 million Christians risk their lives every day. The toll is tragic: 160,000 victims per year in Latin America, North Africa, Arab countries and Asia, 604 missionaries murdered from 1990 to today in Mexico, Colombia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, China and Burma.

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